

Iraq seeks U.N. permission for flights

AMMAN (AP) — Iraq has asked the United Nations sanctions committee to allow its national airline to travel between Amman and Baghdad to fly out sick and elderly Iraqis, diplomats and officials said Friday. An Iraqi embassy official said Nourredine Safi Hammadi, the chairman of Iraqi Airways, asked the U.N. earlier this week to allow the airline to fly once a week to Amman for "strictly humanitarian purposes." A Jordanian cabinet minister said the government was aware of the Iraqi request and that the Kingdom was awaiting the response of the world body. "We have no problems at all to allow Iraqi flights to Jordan, but it all depends on whether the United Nations will approve such a request," the minister said. The Iraqi request, similar to one made earlier this year, comes as Baghdad tries to get the U.N. to lift international sanctions imposed after Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Iraqi airports remain closed under the sweeping embargo. Official delegations and ailing Iraqis seeking treatment in the Middle East and the West use the Jordanian land route, Iraq's main link with the outside world.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية مستقلة سياسية عربية منشورة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الراي»

Merry Christmas

The Jordan Times will not be published on Sunday, Dec. 26, on account of the Christmas holiday on Dec. 25. The next issue of the paper will appear on Monday, Dec. 27. The Jordan Times wishes its readers a very Merry Christmas.

Volume 18 Number 5496

AMMAN SATURDAY-SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25-26, 1993, RAGAB 12-13, 1414

Price: 150 Fils

Kurds agree to ceasefire in Iraq

HALABIA (AFP) — Two rival Kurdish groups in northern Iraq have agreed to halt clashes which killed at least 22 people, Kurdish officials here said on Friday. Mohammad Ahmad, a security officer, told AFP that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the pro-Iranian Kurdistan Islamic League (KIL) met in Halabja, near the Iranian border, and agreed on a ceasefire. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) has denied involvement in the fighting and said it was mediating between the two parties (see page 2).

Ayatollah speaks of past 'Baha'i' killing

NICOSIA (R) — An Iranian Ayatollah told Friday prayer worshippers in Tehran how senior Shi'ite Muslim cleric last century considered killing Baha'is as part of his day-to-day activities. Iranians consider Baha'ism, which originated in Iran in the 19th century, a heretic sect. But Iran's Islamic leaders deny charges that they persecute Baha'is and usually do not publicly discuss past pogroms against them. However, Ayatollah Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili in a sermon quoted a 19th century cleric named Saeed Al Ulama Baboli as saying "for a long time I have been occupied here with day-to-day issues. I am engaged in Baha'i killing." He was speaking to a group of Shi'ites who, after the death of the leading Shi'ite scholar of the time, asked him to take on his mantle. "These are the things I do. Sometimes I don't get to read one page during a whole week," said Baboli, who was in his hometown Babol near the Caspian Sea. He said he did not consider himself to be the most learned scholar, Ayatollah Ardebili said.

Archaeologists find ancient Cyprus port

LYON (AFP) — French archaeologists announced Friday that they had uncovered part of the ancient port of Citium on the island of Cyprus dating from the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. Several years of excavations at Larnaca, on the southeast side of the island, had revealed the ancient port which at the time was the capital of the Cyprus-Phoenician empire. The royal fleet was harboured in the port, according to a report published in La Lettre de la Maison de l'Orient, based in Lyon, eastern France. Archaeologists found shelters on the south of the port — today cut off from the sea — made of parallel ramps leading into hangars covered with a roof resting on rows of columns. Six stone and brick-built shelters have already been found, and the width so far measured between the rows of columns was found to be more than five metres. So far the total length of the ramp inside is not known, although it is thought to be more than 25 metres. A reconstruction of the Athenian vessel Olympias in 1987 showed that the boats, according to ancient texts, were about 37 metres long and 5.50 metres wide.

German held for bid to bomb hostel

WIESBADEN, Germany (R) — Police arrested a 20-year-old German on Friday who confessed to trying to bomb a hostel for foreign refugees. A police spokesman said the unnamed man said he had planted the home-made bomb, made of a length of pipe packed with explosives, because he hated foreigners. The bomb was attached to a car outside the hostel in the town of Taunusstein, near Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, on Thursday and the vehicle was set on fire to trigger an explosion. But firefighters put out the blaze before any blast. The hostel was one of hundreds in Germany for refugees from Eastern Europe and the Third World seeking political asylum. Asylum-seekers have been among the chief targets of a wave of neo-Nazi attacks.

Israel, PLO nearing accord on key issues

Officials hope for final agreements on crossings, Jericho and settlements

By Wafa Amr

AMMAN — The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel are approaching agreement on key security issues blocking implementation of the Palestinian self-rule accord, Palestinian officials said Friday.

They said both sides expect to agree on most issues such as control of border crossings, the area of Jericho and the area of settlements in the Gaza Strip on Monday in Cairo.

Officials said there was agreement on a number of issues during the 14-hour secret talks which ended in France on Thursday. However, other disputed issues required detailed negotiations, which would continue on Monday.

Tunis-based PLO officials said Israel has accepted the raising of the Palestinian flag on border crossings between Gaza Strip and Egypt and Jericho and Jordan. The PLO rejected Israel's demand for hoisting the Israeli flag as well.

The officials said both sides were contemplating agreeing to coordinate on some security issues on checkpoints at the crossings, such as joint PLO-Israeli patrols.

They said both sides had agreed on creating mechanisms to control border crossings. "There has been initial Israeli acceptance to a proposal of having separate windows in the same terminal for travellers going to Israel and the rest of the West Bank and for others passing to Jericho and Gaza Strip... it is an airport terminal system."

"Visitors to Gaza Strip and to Jericho would pass through PLO-managed control points or windows, and their travel documents would be monitored by sophisticated Israeli devices," a PLO official said.

"But we reject an Israeli demand for symbolic physical presence at the PLO-controlled windows."

"Visitors to Israel and the rest of the West Bank would pass through an Israeli control point," he said.

Israel has rejected a PLO request of international presence at the border crossings, officials said.

Key differences that have delayed the implementation of the PLO-Israel accord include control of access to the Gaza Strip and Egypt and to Jericho and Jordan. Under the self-rule deal, Israel should have started withdrawing its troops from Gaza Strip and Jericho on Dec. 13.

PLO officials said the PLO and Israel had reached draft compromise ideas on key issues of contention in Oslo last week. These ideas were under discussion in France, but officials said some issues still required detailed discussions. The area of the Jericho is one of these issues.

"In France, Israel said it would accept that the size of Jericho to be 150 square kilometres, which was what it offered Jordan during disengagement talks back in 1974," one PLO official said.

The PLO has demanded that the size of Jericho be 300 square kilometres almost half its area according to the Israeli demarcation.

PLO officials said real progress has been achieved, but that there was no breakthrough yet. They said Israel was as keen as the PLO to start implementing the September accord before a planned meeting between Syrian President Hafez Al Assad and U.S. President Bill Clinton takes place.

"They are worried that another delay in implementation would prompt Assad to take a more hardline position," said one official.

"We have felt flexibility on Israel's part on several key issues such as security and the area of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip," said one PLO official.

"We believe real progress would be ensued in Cairo on Monday," he said.

Agencies add: A senior PLO official said meanwhile the peace process was endangered by Israel's seizure of Palestinian land in the West Bank to expand Jewish settlements.

"These practices violate the agreement... we are not prepared to continue sitting with them (the Israelis) if these measures are not cancelled," Yasser Abed Rabbo said.

Regarding the issue of who controls checkpoints between Arab states and Palestinian-run areas, Yasser Abed-Rabbo said: "We can say that there was a slight progress in the Israeli position on this issue at the Paris talks but the solution needs more progress from the Israeli side in recognising Palestinian responsibility."

Mr. Abed Rabbo, a PLO Executive Committee member, headed the Palestinian team to talks in Paris. Negotiations which resume in Cairo next Monday were "the last opportunity to reach an accord," Mr. Abed Rabbo said.

He said differences remained over definition of the size of the Jericho area from which Israel's army will withdraw and of the Jewish settlements in Gaza.

"We are ready to coordinate some security aspects with Israel on the checkpoints," Mr. Abed Rabbo said. "The need for security is not an Israeli demand, but also a Palestinian demand."

He also called for an international presence at the border. Still disputed was the size of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, he said.

Israeli demands for a 40-square-kilometre "security zone" around the settlements were unacceptable, he said. It would set a dangerous precedent in legalising settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, he said.

Mr. Abed Rabbo expected the Cairo meeting to last two or three days. PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin might meet after that if enough progress was made.

But he was concerned by Israeli expansion in the West Bank.

"The most dangerous issue for us today is that the Israelis while negotiating about withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho with us, seize new Palestinian lands for settlement purposes west of Ramallah to the east of Jerusalem," he said.

"Such measures will endanger the whole process. They give with one hand and they take back double with the other. Our agreement includes freezing all settlements activities and any seizing of new land, otherwise this agreement will be the greatest deception in our history," he said.

PLO leaders, who met Thursday night to discuss negotiating strategy, felt Mr. Rabin left open the chance for progress in the talks when he agreed to increase the amount of land to be given to Palestinians in Jericho to 150 square kilometres, said Samir Ghosheh, another PLO executive.

Mr. Ghosheh said Mr. Rabin's offer was made through an emissary directly to Mr. Arafat. But he said the PLO leadership decided the offer is not yet enough and that Mr. Arafat had not accepted it.

PLO sources said Mr. Arafat wanted the Jericho zone to measure 200 square kilometres, down from the 267 square kilometres he initially demanded.

Israelis stake out 88 new colonies; Peres voices rejection

OCCUPIED WEST BANK (Agencies) — Jewish settlers marked the sites of at least 88 new settlements in the occupied territories Friday as part of a campaign to scuttle Israel's peace deal with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

"The goal of this campaign is to fight the agreement and bring down the government, which is tearing the nation apart with this pact," said settler spokesman A. David Romanoff.

But the government, which signed a historic self-rule deal with the PLO in Washington in September, said such new settlements would not be allowed to stand.

"Absolutely not, under no circumstances," Settlers have spearheaded Israeli grass-roots opposition to the Palestinian self-rule accord.

Shai Bazak, the spokesman of the council of Jewish settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, announced Wednesday that settlers planned to create the new communities under a project to be launched January 5.

He said it was aimed at obstructing Israel's negotiations with the PLO to implement the autonomy accord.

The government tried to halt all settlement building in the occupied territories last year but finally allowed the completion of 11,000 housing units already under construction.

On Friday, the settlers placed signs identifying scores of sites as future settlements throughout the occupied territories.

The campaign is led by a new group, "this is our land," many of whose activists are U.S.-born immigrants to Israel.

Spokesman Romanoff said there were about 50 settlers and supporters at each new settlement point. He said settlers would only stay at the points for a day or two, but would return in January.

"A total of 130 points will eventually become permanent, doubling the number of the settlements the government will have to contend with," Mr. Romanoff said.

He said the group hoped five or six of the new settlements would become permanent enclaves beginning in January.



A Palestinian replaces the Palestinian flag on the town hall roof of Bethlehem. The flag was taken down by Israeli soldiers (AFP photo)

2 Palestinians and Israeli officer killed in W. Bank, Gaza

GAZA CITY, occupied Gaza Strip (Agencies) — Palestinian hardliners shot dead an Israeli lieutenant colonel and wounded three other soldiers in a road-side ambush Friday in Gaza City.

A Palestinian passer-by was also killed as the soldiers returned fire.

In the West Bank Israeli soldiers shot dead a young Palestinian man Friday in Beit Ummar village near Hebron, Palestinian sources said.

The Israeli army gave no details on the killing of Ahmad Abdul Majid Khaliye, 17. Palestinian sources said his death brought to 1,160 the total of Palestinians killed by Israeli bullets in the occupied territories since the intifada began in December 1987.

The Islamic Resistance Movement, (Hamas), claimed responsibility for the Gaza attack, in a statement issued here. The lieutenant-colonel was the highest-ranking Israeli officer to have been killed by the group.

Three or four assailants in a car fired automatic weapons at a jeep and managed to escape, an army spokesman said.

Meir Mintz, a 36-year-old officer in the infantry, was killed and a major was among the three other Israelis slightly wounded, he said. The army found a Kalashnikov assault rifle and cartridges left behind at the scene.

A Palestinian witness said a Peugeot car burst out of an orchard on the road from the Sheikh Radwan district of Gaza City to Jabalia refugee camp and fired at the jeep, killing the officer.

One of the soldiers shot back with a pistol, killing a passer-by, he said.

On Thursday, the armed wing of Hamas announced a halt to attacks on Jewish settlements until Dec. 26 but vowed to carry on its strikes against the Israeli army.

"We are giving a chance" to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to order the Israeli army to cease fire, said the Ezzeddin Al Qassam group.

Since the autonomy deal, Palestinian opponents of the Sept. 13 Israeli-PLO autonomy accord such as Hamas have killed 20 Israelis, 12 of them civilians.

Israeli troops were to have begun withdrawing from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on Dec. 13 under the terms of the Palestinian self-rule accord but the deadline was missed due to continued dispute over the exact terms of the deal.

In Amman, Hamas denied Friday it had offered Israel a truce to stop attacking Jewish settlers and vowed to step up its attacks on settlers.

The alleged reports that have circulated about Hamas and its military wing calling for

a ceasefire in the occupied territories are baseless and untrue," Mohammad Nazal, Hamas's representative in Jordan, told Reuters.

"Hamas's position is clear. We will continue to resist the occupiers until they leave our Palestinian soil... we will continue our escalation of attacks on military targets and settlers in the coming days," Mr. Nazal said.

The statement by Izzeddin Al Qassam Brigades, distributed in a leaflet in Gaza on Thursday, said it was "willing to review its position concerning attacks on settlers."

It gave Mr. Rabin three days to go on television and announce a truce.

Hamas, the most active opponent of the Israel-PLO peace deal, has claimed responsibility for killing two Israelis in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday.

A spokesman for Mr. Rabin declined on Thursday to comment on the Hamas statement, but senior Israeli sources were reported on Israeli Television as dismissing the "offer" as "propaganda."

Hamas says it killed 13 of the 20 Israelis who have died in guerrilla attacks since the September peace deal. It said it had begun attacking Jewish settlers because the Israeli army was killing unarmed Arabs.

Hijackers free most hostages for \$8m ransom in Russia

MOSCOW (Agencies) — Armed men holding about a dozen schoolchildren hostage on a helicopter in southern Russia released most of their captives Friday in exchange for an \$8 million ransom, an official said.

The gunmen freed seven children and a teacher but still held four children and three adults and were demanding to be flown to the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

The drama started Thursday when the hostages were seized Thursday from a school in the town of Rostov-on-Don.

Ivan Teteriatnikov, deputy police chief in the southern Stavropol region, said seven teenagers and their teacher were freed Friday in exchange for the ransom which was flown from Moscow.

Their release, which followed the liberation of two children Thursday, left four children, a bus driver and two pilots on the helicopter which had flown them from Rostov-on-Don to Mineralnye Vody.

Initially the gunmen had demanded \$10 million ransom, which was put together from private banks in Moscow and flown to Mineralnye Vody during the afternoon.

Mr. Teteriatnikov cited the gunmen as saying they wanted to keep a number of hostages to ensure their own safety, and also as agreeing to accept "only" an \$8 million ransom.

The gunmen were now demanding to leave the Russian spa town, where the helicopter

landed early Friday morning, to Baku, via Makhachkala, capital of the Russian republic of Dagestan, he said.

They had initially demanded to be flown to Iran.

The hijackers said they would release the other hostages in Baku before proceeding to Iran, said Vladimir Shcherbakov, a duty officer at the Mineralnye Vody police department.

The hijackers earlier had allowed authorities to send blankets and hot food to the shivering children on an over-cast winter day.

Viktor Gerashchenko, chairman of Russia's central bank, told reporters in Moscow that it was not easy for the government to gather so much foreign cash on short notice. Some of the money was borrowed from private banks, he said.

"The country's leadership quite correctly considers human life to be its top priority. There is nothing more valuable than life, especially the lives of innocent children," he said.

Commandos of the former KGB's elite "Alpha" unit and other troops also arrived at the airport Friday. But there was no sign of a rescue attempt.

Earlier, Friday, the gunmen ordered the helicopter to take off, then landed an hour later after circling Mineralnye Vody, a mineral springs resort 1,300 kilometres south of Moscow. Russian TV said they were forced to turn around by helicopters carrying commandos, but security ministry spokesman Alexei Kandaurov

said bad weather kept the aircraft from heading south towards Iran.

"The bandits are changing their demands and conditions every minute, and they could change their destination, too. They don't really know what they want," Maxim Peshkov, a Russian Foreign Ministry official, told the Associated Press.

In Tehran, the Iranian Foreign Ministry expressed "deep concern over the ugly and indecent act of hijacking several innocent children" and said the Islamic republic was ready to cooperate with the Russian government to save the children's lives.

The drama began Thursday morning when the gunmen, armed with three automatic rifles and a pistol, burst into a classroom at school No. 25 in Rostov-on-Don.

They forced teacher Ludmila Selikhova and approximately a dozen students, believed to be about 14 years old, into a bus and drove to a military air base, where they demanded a plane or helicopter to Iran.

It was not clear exactly why the gunmen chose Iran as their destination, Itar-Tass said they were "Caucasians," meaning that they came from the Caucasus mountains region of southern Russia, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Itar-Tass quoted some children as saying the hostage takers wanted treatment for syphilis. A conflicting report said the gunmen warned that they were infected with AIDS and had nothing to lose.

Palestinians win 'battle of flags' in Bethlehem

BETHLEHEM, occupied West Bank (Agencies) — The Palestinians Friday won their four-day battle of the flags with the Israeli army in Bethlehem, allowing Christmas eve festivities in the birthplace of Jesus to go ahead as planned.

"There's no use fighting against a flag and so we decided to let it go so as not to spoil the festivities," General Gaby Zohar, head of the military administration for the West Bank, told AFP.

"But we think it's a shame to mix nationalism with religion," Elias Freij, mayor of the West bank town and a peace negotiator with Israel, battled for four days with the army, which on Tuesday ordered the Palestinian flag to be lowered from the town hall.

On Friday morning, just hours after the red-green-black-white flag was torn down for the second time members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah faction asked the mayor for permission to raise the colours again.

"Do what you want. I haven't been able to get the Israeli authorities to agree," was Mr. Freij's response. The defiant activists raised the flags, and after moments of hesitation and tension, the soldiers decided to take no action.

On Wednesday and Thursday nights, the army pulled down the flags under the cover of darkness, trying to avoid both the media and confrontation, but they went up again.

Mr. Freij had threatened to call off the Christmas festivities, which he himself had declared for the first time on six years of intifada against Israeli rule, to mark the Sept. 13 autonomy deal.

But Mr. Arafat intervened on Thursday, phoning the mayor to order that the festivities go ahead. The PLO chairman promised to contact Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and find a solution.

Mr. Rabin refuses to allow Palestinian flags over public, municipal and religious buildings, although the colours have been hoisted across the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the Israel-PLO accord on autonomy.

But Tourism Minister Uzi Baram said Friday that it was wrong to allow such a fuss over flags.

"We have the right to hoist our national symbol, but we will do everything to avoid clashes with soldiers so that Christmas passes in peace," Mr. Freij said.

While hundreds of Palestinian scouts paraded through Manger Square in front of the Church of the Nativity, a Palestinian climbed a ladder and replaced the flag Friday.

Israeli police tried to detain the man, but crowds hustled him into the cityhall and taunted the officers with cries of "Fateh."

After a few minutes, under the glare of television cameras from around the world, the police gave up trying to reach the activist.

Israeli forces had not attempted to interfere with the parading scouts who were marching behind Palestinian flags past several thousand onlookers.

Fateh spokesman Nafiz Al Rifai stood under the flag on the municipality steps and said: "We said we would raise the flag if the Israelis pulled it down and we have done so. This is a Palestinian national holiday for Christians and Muslims."

Mr. Arafat, in a three-page Christmas message faxed to Bethlehem, said all Palestinians regardless of their faith must work together to build an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Arafat said he hoped to be in Bethlehem for next Christmas.

"We are embarking on a new and decisive stage in the

(Continued on page 5)

Rabin's Christmas speech urges patience for peace

NAZARETH (Agencies) — Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, bringing Christmas greetings to Arabs in the Galilee town where Jesus lived, urged Israelis and Palestinians not to lose faith in the pursuit of peace.

"We will overcome the obstacles and find the solutions. But please, let's not lose patience," he told Arab Christian leaders in Nazareth, the biggest Arab city in Israel, on Thursday.

Arabs from all over Galilee gave Mr. Rabin a warm welcome in Nazareth, where Jesus made his home.

But in Bethlehem, Jesus's traditional birthplace in the occupied West Bank, a row-sung with Israel over the raising of a Palestinian flag.

Palestinians hoisted the flag up a five-metre pole outside city hall. Israel said so blatant a symbol of Palestinian statehood must not fly from a public building in the occupied territories.

"This is a Palestinian feast and we want to celebrate it with our national flag," insisted Nafiz Al Rifai, an activist from the Fateh movement in Bethlehem.

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in September signed a historic accord offering limited autonomy to Palestinians on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But Israeli and PLO negotiators have since then failed to agree on implementing the agreement, which is to take effect initially on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

Fateh is keen to sell the accord on limited self-rule and a troop withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho as the foundation

stone of an independent homeland. Hence its attachment to the symbols and trappings of statehood. The flags, outlawed before the September accord, fly from many private homes but few public buildings.

Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij, defending the flag, said the row could force him to cancel the first Christmas planned in Bethlehem in the six years since the start of the Palestinian uprising.

It was unclear how the affair would end.

In a reminder of the violence that has plagued the occupied territories, a small pipe-bomb was discovered and defused by the Israeli army near the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square on Thursday night. It was not known who planted the device.

In Nazareth, home to 60,000 Israeli-Arab citizens, Mr. Rabin dodged questions about the flag dispute and everything else.

But in a speech he said: "Let us not forget that we are partners — Palestinians, the PLO and us — on the (peace) path. We must stick to this path, even if there are brief stops, and not lose the faith and hope we will achieve our goal."

In Nazareth there was no sense of the menace pervading Bethlehem, the other major Christmas venue in the Holy Land. The only flags in sight were little Palestinian ones beside Mr. Rabin as he spoke at a hotel.

Nazareth, a half-Christian, half-Muslim town, is site of the Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation, built on the site where tradition says angels told Mary she would bear the Son of God.

Speakers who greeted Mr. Rabin praised the birth both of

Jesus and of Arab-Israeli peace. Hundreds applauded when he was presented as the brave man who chose to walk the path of peace.

Answering criticism by Tewfik Zayyad, Nazareth's mayor and an Israeli parliament member, Mr. Rabin committed his government to work for greater equality of Israeli Arabs and Jews.

One of the chief complaints of Israel's 800,000 Arab citizens is that they do not receive government services equal to those of 4.3 million Jews.

Israel and Palestinian peace-makers are due to resume their talks in Cairo on Monday, hoping to break a deadlock that delayed the planned Dec. 13 withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

Smith meets Rabin

Mr. Rabin briefed Britain's opposition Labour Party leader John Smith on the Middle East peace process Wednesday, a government spokesman said.

"The prime minister drew a picture of the peace process and the general situation in the Middle East," spokesman Gad Ben-Ari said.

"He explained the progress made in discussions with the Palestinians and Arab countries."

Mr. Smith, who arrived on Monday night, was also scheduled to meet Palestinian leaders, tour the Galilee and Golan Heights and take a three-day family holiday in Israel before flying home on Dec. 30.

The Labour leader was invited by the Israeli Labour Party and the foreign ministry.



U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu decorate a Christmas tree (AFP photo)

Strong U.N. presence needed in Somalia for a year — diplomats

UNITED NATIONS (Agencies) — A strong U.N. presence is needed in Somalia for at least a year after the withdrawal of U.S. troops to give the war and famine-ravaged country a chance to rebuild.

U.N. officials say. The international organisation faces a difficult task in the coming months, with units from France, Belgium, Germany and Italy due to leave Somalia along with the remaining 11,000 U.S. forces, due to leave by March 31.

But Britain's U.N. Ambassador Sir David Hannay said the Security Council countries hoped to maintain a substantial U.N. presence beyond March.

Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has been seeing peacekeeping forces from some 40 countries — notably African states as well as India, Pakistan and Malaysia — to keep the level of troops at about 20,000 from the current 29,000, a Western diplomat said.

Diplomats said U.S. Admiral Jonathan Howe, the Security Council representative in Somalia, told a closed-door meeting Tuesday that an end to the U.N. mission in March could plunge the country back into chaos, but that prospects would be better if the mission is extended until March 1995.

Mr. Hannay said that in the interim, the U.N. must work on establishing a national council that will bring together warring clans in Somalia.

Mr. Howe's comments to Security Council members and during a meeting with ambassadors from troop-contributing states were related to reporters as the council was trying to figure out how to hold together the operation after U.N. States troops pull out in March.

The most hopeful news came from Pakistan which offered 1,500 infantry troops, a hospital unit and support soldiers for a total of about 2,500 personnel. This would be in addition to the 5,000 Pakistanis already in Somalia.

One condition is that they receive proper equipment from the United States or elsewhere. Pakistani envoys said, Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Jumsheed Marker made the offer despite the 33 casualties his country has suffered.

In addition to Pakistan, which may command the operation, troops are expected from India, Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria and other states, although few have committed themselves yet. But heavy equipment and logistics are still lacking.

"Over time clearly we must move to a civilian operation by scaling down the troops," Mr. Howe, a retired U.S. rear admiral, was quoted as saying. "In the interim, troops will be

needed, in ever reducing numbers we hope, until March 1995."

Most U.N. forces to date have been tied down in Mogadishu, sealed behind barracks, against hostile militia, many loyal to warlord General Mohammed Farah Aided.

Fierce battles in October in which 18 U.S. Army Rangers were killed resulted in President Bill Clinton's decision to remove all American troops by March 31.

Diplomats said Mr. Howe wanted a smaller presence in Mogadishu and more U.N. efforts in areas where recreating political structures and a functioning police force were possible.

To this end other ports, airports and supply routes would have to be opened to avoid dependence on the capital.

Mr. Howe hopes Somalis can create a loose transitional national council next month even if General Aided refuses to join.

"There is no plan to isolate anyone," Ambassador Hannay told reporters.

"The approach is to find an inclusive solution that includes all the clans in Somalia... that does not mean to say it could not be established in a less than inclusive way," he told reporters.

18 said killed in Iraqi Kurdish clash

ANKARA (R) — Clashes in northern Iraq between rival Iraqi Kurdish groups have killed at least 18 people in the past few days, a Kurdish official said Friday.

Saeed Dizayee, Ankara-based representative of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), said the KDP would mediate between the Kurdish Islamic Party (KIP) and the leftist Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) if the two sides agreed to a ceasefire.

"It's a vendetta which started a few months ago and seemed to have settled down but has now erupted again," he told Reuters. "Both sides are on the alert."

The fundamentalist KIP, said to have links with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, has long refused to integrate its forces within the united Peshmarga army set up by the regional Kurdish government which holds sway in northern Iraq.

Mr. Dizayee said the clashes began after the burial of a KIP man in the northeastern town of Ramana four days ago. KIP fighters stormed a PUK office in the town, killing five PUK members.

The PUK then retaliated with an attack which killed four KIP members in the nearby town of Khoi Sanjak.

Five PUK fighters and three PUK men, including a major named Karzan, were killed in clashes on Thursday in the mountainous Haybat Sultan area between Khoi Sanjak and Sulaymaniyah.

Clashes between the two groups have also been reported in Chamchamal on the

Sulaymaniyah-Kirkuk road, and in Shaqlawa.

KDP leader Massoud Barzani met in Erbil last Saturday and agreed to form an eight-man security committee comprising themselves, the head of the regional government, the parliament speaker and two other leading members of the KDP and PUK with a mandate to enforce the rule of law.

The two men, who command large followings in northern Iraq, urged "the resolution of all differences and problems through brotherly ways and political means and (without) use of arms."

That move was prompted by an attack on government forces by fighters loyal to a renegade member of the now-dissolved Kurdish Socialist Party, named Mohammad Hajar Mahmood.

Kurds gained control of a big swathe of northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf war. Since then Western warplanes based in Turkey have protected them from Iraqi government forces.

The Turkish cabinet agreed on Thursday to ask parliament to renew for a further six months the mandate of the Western force, known as Operation Provide Comfort Two.

The United States, Britain and France have protested to Iraq about an incident on Tuesday in which they said Iraqi soldiers fired on a patrol of 25 U.S. British, French, Kurdish and Turkish personnel in a four-vehicle convoy.

They warned Iraq of unspecified serious consequences if its troops fired again at an international patrol.

U.S. honours employees executed in Sudan

KHARTOUM (AFP) — The United States government has presented the families of two Sudanese nationals executed while serving with USAID in southern Sudan a prestigious award, the U.S. embassy here said Thursday.

The award was granted to the families of Andrew Tombe and Boudoin Tally "in recognition of the exceptional loyalty, valor and heroism they displayed in service to the U.S. government's humanitarian relief efforts and to their colleagues," the embassy said in a statement.

The awards were presented to the families of the deceased in a ceremony organised at the U.S. embassy Tuesday, it said.

Mr. Tombe and Mr. Tally, who worked at USAID's office in Juba in southern Sudan, were arrested in mid-1992 and executed by the Sudanese government.

"The release lamented that to this date the government of Sudan has yet to provide these employees' families and the U.S. government with a satisfactory explanation of how and why they died."

An earlier government statement said Mr. Tombe had been executed in October 1992 after confessing at his trial in Juba on August 15 last year to anti-government activities.

The embassy said that statement had referred to unnamed witnesses and an alleged confession by Mr. Tombe that has never been released.

Palestinian children to learn own history

By Acil Tabbara
Agence France Presse

BIR ZEIT, occupied West Bank — Palestinian children will next year for the first time study the history of their own people and learn that Israel has the right to exist alongside a future Palestinian state.

"Our history books will be based on resolutions of the Palestine National Council which stipulate the right to a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel," said Fathieh Nasro, a lecturer at the department of education at the main Palestinian university of Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah.

"Our teachers will relate the creation of the state of Israel with reference to United Nations Resolution 181 on the partition of Palestine and the exile of hundreds of thousands of their parents through Resolution 194 which stipulates their right to return or to compensation."

She added: "They will relate the known facts of our history and rely on U.N. resolutions leaving aside ideological prejudices."

The new works will be used on an experimental basis in some schools in 1994 before becoming standards texts throughout the Palestinian education system the following year.

Geography books will show the different stages of the partition in maps, first under the British mandate after the 1947 U.N. vote, in 1949 after an armistice between Israel and Arabs, and then the map of occupation following the 1967 Middle East war.

Since the signing on Sept. 13 of the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) autonomy agreement, 124 Palestinian education experts have been hammering out a unified curriculum for the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Naim Abul Hommos, general secretary of the Palestinian Higher Education Council, which brings together all educational establishments, said the curriculum had been developed in the autonomy talks at El Arish, Egypt, where Israel and the PLO have negotiated the transfer of civilian power.

"The Israelis at first demanded a say in the programmes, which we refused," said Mr. Hommos, who took part in the El Arish talks.

"We finally settled on a resolution saying the Palestinian and Israeli school programmes should contribute to the peace process," he said.

"We are talking about a revolution because until now Palestinians have never studied text books which they have prepared themselves."

During the mandate period, the British set the curriculum, then Jordan in the West Bank and Egypt in the Gaza Strip.

After 1967, the Israeli military authorities removed all references to the Palestinian question as well as maps of Palestine. Even the word Palestine disappeared from text books and the curriculum has not changed in 26 years.

Today Palestinian children still learn from tattered text books that, "The Yemenite people pursue the fight against British occupation."

But that finished in 1967. They are taught that the United Arab Republic, a brief union between Egypt and Syria which ended in 1962, still exists.

In the Gaza Strip, students learn the history of the pharaohs.

"Palestinian pupils study from books which have nothing to do with reality," said Mr. Nasro. They learn everything about the Nabatean city of Petra, but nothing about Jerusalem, their capital.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fresh claims of Gulf syndrome in Britain

LONDON (R) — Fresh claims emerged on Friday of British Gulf war veterans suffering from an unexplained illness since serving in the Gulf to drive Iraq from Kuwait. The Guardian newspaper, which on Thursday launched extensive coverage of illnesses among United States servicemen and their children, reported similar problems among British servicemen. In one case a British doctor who served on an air force base in the Gulf believed she had contracted the so-called Gulf syndrome, leading to unexplained breathing problems, high temperatures, chest pains, profuse sweating and sickness. She had been treating others suffering from such an illness. The Guardian reports say as many as 500 British service personnel are suffering from similar symptoms to the 4,000 U.S. Gulf veterans said to be suffering from the syndrome. Some have fallen ill themselves, others have had children with defects. The ill doctor, whom the Guardian did not name, was quoted as suggesting her illness could also be passed to others. "At times I was unable to walk straight and I slurred my speech as though I was drunk," she said. "My father, who was caring for me, also contracted the symptoms. He broke out in a rash of blisters and was in hospital for two weeks." No one seems to have a clear answer on the cause of the syndrome. Some researchers have pointed to the widespread use of depleted uranium-tipped, armour-piercing weapons in the 1991 Gulf war, suggesting large areas could be contaminated by radioactivity.

Turkey deports freed, German reporter

ISTANBUL (R) — Turkish authorities on Friday deported a German journalist who was jailed on charges of helping rebel Kurds, the Anatolia news agency said. Stefan Waldborg, 26, was released from jail in the Aegean port of Izmir on Thursday on a presidential pardon and flown home to Germany. President Suleyman Demirel pardoned him after receiving a medical report that he was suffering from "chronic psychosis." A court sentenced Mr. Waldborg to three years and nine months in January for helping and sheltering guerrillas of the separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK). He was arrested in November 1992 on suspicion of being a PKK courier. Tape cassettes and documents of separatist Kurds were found in his possession. Mr. Waldborg, a warehouse worker for an electronic company in Freiburg, Germany, worked as a freelance journalist for Radio Dreyeckland in the same town.

UAE offers rewards for information on drugs

ABU DHABI (R) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Friday offered rewards for people with information of drug smugglers. The Emirates News Agency (WAM) quoted an Interior Ministry official as saying authorities will give rewards of more than 200,000 dirhams (\$54,495) "to those who give information that leads to the arrest of drug smugglers and traffickers." "The official said assurances would be given to safeguard the secrecy of the information and its source." The official gave telephone numbers that people could call in the seven emirates of the UAE, the region's busiest trade centre with 12 ports. "The Interior Ministry urges each citizen and resident to directly contribute to this national duty... towards protecting the current and future generations from the destructive effects of drugs," WAM said. The UAE blames a growth in the drug trade on foreigners who make up more than 70 per cent of its two million people. Officials say the UAE authorities seized more than eight tonnes of drugs between 1987 and 1992.

India, Israel to cooperate in agriculture

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India and Israel signed an agreement here Friday for cooperation in the fields of agricultural science and technology, including research, education and joint ventures. The agreement was inked by Agriculture Ministers Balam Jakhur of India and Yaakov Tsur of Israel. Indian officials said a key area of cooperation would be in water and soil management, including the optimal use of water through sprinkler irrigation systems, the development of ground water resources and erosion control. "There is a vast scope for bilateral cooperation," Mr. Jakhur said, adding that India would import liquid fertilisers from Israel to boost production. Mr. Tsur said scientists from the two countries which established diplomatic links only last year, "can cooperate intensively in plant and animal sciences, plant protection, veterinary science, farm mechanisation and technology."

Sudan and Ethiopia to boost ties

KHARTOUM (R) — Sudan and its eastern neighbour Ethiopia, who have had troubled relations in the past, have agreed to improve ties. An eight-day meeting of a joint ministerial committee, headed by Sudan Vice President Major General Ali Zubeir Mohammad Saleh and Ethiopian Prime Minister Taimrat Layne, ended in Khartoum on Thursday. The two sides signed nine agreements to promote trade and commerce and encourage cooperation in culture in the fields of information, youth, education, health, water resources and refugee problems. Three trade agreements worth between \$10 million and \$15 million were also endorsed. They agreed to combat customs fees evasion at the border and car smuggling. Sudan and Ethiopia also decided to build cross-border roads, one of them a highway, at a cost of \$51 million.

U.S. will not release Somalia battle footage

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military will not release a video of an Oct. 3 gun battle that killed 18 American troops in Somalia and probably contributed to the resignation of U.S. Defence Secretary Les Aspin, a newspaper says. The U.S. Defence Department cited national security considerations in rejecting requests by ABC News and the National Security News Agency to obtain the tapes, the Boston Globe reported in Friday's editions. According to the globe, the film shows: Two ranger helicopters going down, two members of a U.S. Army Delta sniper team dropping from a helicopter to protect survivors of one of the crashed craft until they in turn run out of ammunition and are killed; another small helicopter making a daring landing in the middle of a street to take off wounded.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

17:30 Pif El Hercule
17:41 L'Ecole Des Fais
18:30 Beaumanoir
19:00 News in French
19:15 Ushma
19:30 News in Hebrew
20:00 News in Arabic
20:30 The Fanelli Boys
21:00 Da Best's On
21:30 Perspectives
22:00 News in English
22:30 Future Film "Call Of The Wild"

PRAYER TIMES

05:06 Fajr
06:30 Sunrise/Duha
11:35 Dhuhur
14:19 Asr
16:42 Maghreb
18:05 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swifeth, Tel. 810740
Assumptions of God Church, Tel. 62785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 62490
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 62740
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terremas Church Tel. 62346

Church of the Annunciation Tel.

62341
Anglican Church Tel. 630851, Tel. 628543
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 71331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 77261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Assumptions International Church Tel. 62526
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 661195
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Tel. 823824, 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

The weather will be clear and relatively cold. Fog will cover the desert and mountainous areas during the night and the early morning. In the day time a slight rise in temperature will take place. Windy will be easterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and sea calm.

Amman Min./Max. temp. 13/22
Decbr 4/19

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDER

Jordan Valley 10/23

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17, Aqaba 22. Humidity readings: Amman 64 per cent, Aqaba 56 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Mohammad Al Suway 720256
Dr. Jamil Maraga 776149
Dr. Mukkies Halasa 819229
Dr. Jamal Jibarah 847351
First pharmacy 661912
Feydous pharmacy 778336
Al Asoma pharmacy 637055
Nasroukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636720
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Najib pharmacy 847632

REID:
Dr. Ali Omari 273032
Al Quds Pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Yousef Awad 988775

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Emergency 630341
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 891228
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 610230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 680100
Water Authority 815615
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power

Company 636381

RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/216
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn 644281/6
Akil Maternity, J. Amn 64241/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malha, J. Amman 636140
Palestine Shmeisani 664171/4
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Musasher Hospital 66727/9
The Islamic, Abdali 66612/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 77101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 891611/15
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)90560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)99090
IBRD:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)272555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:30 Jakarta, Singapore (RJ)
09:25 New Delhi (RJ)
09:25 Amman (RJ)
09:30 Karachi, Delhi (RJ)
10:30 Beirut (RJ)
10:30 Colombo (RJ)
10:30 London (RJ)
10:30 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
14:05 Paris, Frankfurt (RJ)
17:55 London, Berlin (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

04:28 Vienna (OA)
10:30 Sanaa (YV)
17:35 Rome (AZ)
18:45 Dubai (EM)
20:10 Paris, Damascus (AF)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

06:00 Beirut (RJ)
07:00 Amman (RJ)
11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:35 Paris, Brussels (RJ)
11:45 Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
12:05 London (RJ)
12:45 Cairo (RJ)
16:30 (add.) Jeddah (RJ)
20:30 Larnaca (RJ)
20:30 Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:30 Jeddah (RJ)
20:45 Damascus (RJ)
21:30 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

11:30 Sanaa (YV)
11:40 Larnaca (RJ)
12:50 Vienna (OA)
18:45 Rome (AZ)
19:45 Dubai (EM)
23:55 Damascus, Paris (AF)

HAJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep

Japan to extend over 30m in aid to Jordan next year

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Japan is appreciative of the Jordanian contribution to the Arab-Israeli peace process and will extend \$30 million to \$40 million in aid to the Kingdom during 1994 in addition to financing a major power-generation project in Aqaba, according to a senior official.

The official said the peace process was one of the key topics for the discussions that Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali held with his Japanese counterpart Morihiro Hosokawa and other Japanese government leaders during his visit in mid-December to Tokyo.

The Japanese leaders expressed appreciation of Jordan's commitment to a negotiated peace settlement with Israel and urged the Kingdom to make some "symbolic" gesture to reflect the progress Jordan has reached in peace talks with

the Jewish state, said the official, who did not want to be identified.

In his talks with Dr. Majali, Mr. Hosokawa pledged Japanese help to Jordan to reduce the Kingdom's foreign debts, Tokyo Foreign Ministry officials said. But this does not mean any writing off of the Kingdom's debts to Japan since Tokyo is an ardent opponent of such type of debt relief.

The underlying philosophy in the Japanese approach to international assistance was shaped by Japan's own experience after World War II. Japan, which grew from the ashes of its economy after the war to become one of the top international aid donors, insists that aid recipients depend on themselves to develop their economies and repay foreign debts in the long term rather than seeking debt relief in the form of write-off.

Japan holds \$900 million in Jordanian debts, the bulk of it (up to \$800 million) extended in the form of soft

loans with one per cent annual interest and repayable in 30 years. The loans were mostly extended shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and aimed at helping Jordan absorb its economic losses from the crisis sparked by the invasion.

The Japanese government is ready to reschedule Jordan's debt repayments, but said debt write-off was out of question, the official said. Tokyo promised to look into a Jordanian request to extend up to \$150 million in loans to an expansion project of the Aqaba Thermal Power Plant, the official said.

The project, which entails doubling the 130-megawatt diesel-run generation capacity at the plant, was frozen in 1989 when commercial quantity gas was found in the Kingdom's eastern border with Iraq.

According to the official, the return of more than 320,000 Jordanian expatriates after the Gulf crisis scrambled the Kingdom's power-generation plans and

warranted the resurrection of the Aqaba project to meet the projected demand in the next few years.

It was not immediately clear whether the sought-for \$150 million Japanese loan for the plan included an \$80 million credit that was pledged in early 1993 at a donors' conference in Paris.

That \$80 million matched a World Bank loan to Jordan to help streamline the Kingdom's energy sector. In addition to the \$30 to \$40 million in technical aid and the \$150 million loan for the Aqaba project, Japan will also extend financing for other projects in Jordan, the official said. Details of the projects have not been worked out, the official added.

Jordan does not qualify for outright Japanese grants since Tokyo continues to follow an international convention which allows assistance to be given to countries with less than \$800 per capita income. Jordan's per capita income was \$1,020 in 1992.

Crown Prince briefs new deputies on political, economic developments

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Thursday briefed newly-elected parliament members on the latest developments in the peace process and the political and economic pressures which Jordan has been facing since the Gulf crisis.

The Prince spoke at length about Jordan's policies that back the Palestinian drive to ensure the Palestinian people their legitimate rights in their homeland.

Crown Prince Hassan was addressing the audience during a breakfast banquet held at Basman Palace and attended by His Majesty King Hussein.

The King discussed with the deputies a number of issues, answered their inquiries and wished them success in their important task.

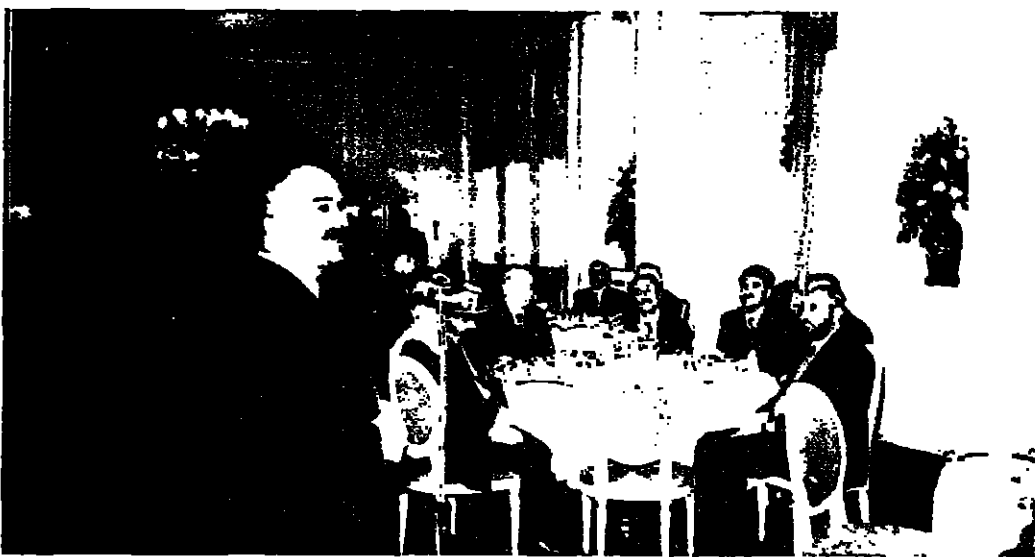
At the meeting, which was attended by House Speaker Taher Al Masri and Prime Minister Abdul Salam Al Majali as well as the King's advisers, the Crown Prince stressed the need for enhancing the process of close consultations with the deputies.

"We would also like to emphasise the importance of the Jordanian role in maintaining stability in the region amid continued Israeli attempts to impose hegemony on the region," Prince Hassan stressed.

Referring to Jordan's implementation of the economic restructuring programme, the Crown Prince said that the World Bank has paid tribute to Jordan for its success in implementing the programme which yielded good results.



His Majesty King Hussein greets the deputies. (Below) His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan outlines to the deputies the latest political and economic developments (Petra photo)



Economic consultancy Council to discuss sales tax draft Monday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali will chair an Economic Consultancy Council meeting Monday to discuss a draft law on the controversial sales tax.

The council members, representing economic and commercial sectors will discuss the government's dispute with the private industrial and commercial sectors over this law which surfaced during the last Tuesday's traders and industrialists' meeting with Finance Minister Sami Gammo.

Mr. Gammo said Tuesday that the government's move towards the introduction of the sales tax would not represent a new tax and would not lead to higher prices since the new tax was aimed at correcting certain imbalances in the present taxation system.

He stressed that the sales tax would only replace the present consumption tax.

The minister noted that

under the present system, four main categories paid 70 per cent of the JD 143 million collected in 1993. He specified the categories as being the cigarettes, cement, soft drinks and steel bars industries.

The issue has drawn debate for more than a year.

Meanwhile Minister of Supply Radi Ibrahim has announced that the government was in the process of preparing a list of citizens whose monthly income exceeds JD 500 and, therefore, should not be given supply card.

The minister noted this group was no more eligible to receive food coupons as of the beginning of 1994.

He said that the card cancellation measure would allow the government to provide basic food supplies to limited income groups according to a government decision.

Workshop studies link of demographic changes and development planning

AMMAN (Petra) — The U.N. Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) has opened an eight-day workshop at the University of Jordan to discuss ways of incorporating demographic changes in Jordan's developmental planning.

Organised in cooperation with the University of Jordan's department for population studies, the workshop includes lectures and practical applications designed to orient the participants from private and public sector institutions on modern trends linking demographic changes to development schemes and consumption of food and water, said Mousa

Samha, head of the University's department director in an address at the opening session.

Lina Obaidat, assistant to the U.N. Fund director in Jordan, paid tribute to the continued and fruitful cooperation between the fund and the university which established the department in 1976.

Addressing the opening session also was Mohammad Maqsood the university's vice president for academic affairs, who underlined the links between the demographic changes to social and economic development in the country's urban and rural regions.

WHAT'S GOING ON

The following listings are compiled from monthly bulletins and the daily Arabic press. Readers are advised to verify the listed time and place with the concerned institutions.

EXHIBITIONS

- ★ The second exhibition of engineering books at the Jordan Engineers Association.
- ★ Exhibition on the 100th anniversary of the death of French novelist Guy De Maupassant at the French Cultural Centre.
- ★ Exhibition of Iraqi books at the Royal Cultural Centre.
- ★ Art exhibition by artists Ibrahim Al Abduli and Abdul Hussein Twaif at Alia Art Gallery.
- ★ Art exhibition by a number of Jordanian artists entitled "The Sixth Exhibition — Samples From The Contemporary Jordanian Art 93" at the Spanish Cultural Centre.
- ★ Exhibition "Prints and Drawings of Fakhrulnissa Zeid" (1915-1991) until the 15th of January '94 at Darat al Funn of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation. Also showing the "Permanent" Exhibition. (Tel. 643251/2).

CHRISTMAS BAZAARS

- ★ Christmas bazaar at Al Nukhlah Exhibition Hall, University Road (Tel. 837304, 684257).
- ★ Christmas bazaar at the Amman International Auto Exhibition/Airport Road.

LECTURE

- ★ Lecture in Arabic entitled "In the Historical Memory in Light of the Current Stage in the Arab-Israeli Dispute" by Dr. Ahmad Sidiqi Al Dajani at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation at 6:00 p.m.

Radio and TV Corp to have new staff regulation

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan Radio and Television Corporation Director-General Radi Al Khas Friday said the corporation will implement a new staff regulation as of the beginning of 1994.

Mr. Al Khas said the new regulation was one of the most modern in the world noting that it would contribute to attracting the best and highly qualified cadres which, in turn, will be translated into better programme and better performance.

The new regulation will cover almost 1,000 people working at Jordan Radio and Television. One of the major features of the new regulations is that it gives the salary to the post and not to the degree which the employee holds.

Under the new regulation, Jordan Radio and Television employees will get attractive salaries in return for unique performance to encourage them to dedicate all their time to their work in the radio and TV.

Radio and TV staff, who will be covered by this regulation, will not be allowed to do any part-time jobs outside their duty stations.

Mr. Al Khas stressed the need for producing new high quality programmes that can compete with international programmes.

He announced that Jordan Television will start airing a live morning TV programme entitled "Good Morning Jordan," as of January.

Miserable Christmas for thousands

(Continued from page 10)

warned of worsening floods.

In France weathermen warned of gusting winds of up to 120 kilometres an hour on the Channel coast, up to 100 kilometres on the Atlantic coast with Corsica facing gales of up to 150 kilometres an hour. In the coming days, a cold front accompanied by more rain and snow was expected to move across the continent.

In Bonn and the historic city of Cologne the waters were slowly subsiding Friday morning after being swamped by record flows. Parts of the old town of Cologne were still immersed Friday, and hundreds of people had been forced to flee their homes.

In Lille, northern France, homeowners were preparing to

spend Christmas under water as experts warned the Aisne would reach record levels at about midday Saturday in Soissons. In flooded areas residents have been told to leave their homes before Christmas day (Saturday).

Two policemen were feared drowned overnight Thursday in Ardennes, northern France after failing to return from their night patrol in their car.

Libya denies knowledge

(Continued from page 10)

But his apparent slip of the tongue points to the embarrassment and irritation the incident has caused the Egyptians, an ally of both Libya and its main foe, the United States.

President Bill Clinton wrote to Egypt to express his concern about the disappearance of

the Pan Am plane and two Libyans accused of planting the bomb would not hand themselves over for trial.

The United Nations imposed sanctions on Libya in April last year and tightened them this month because it has failed to hand over the men for trial in either the United States, since the plane was American, or Scotland, since it exploded above the Scottish town

the Pan Am plane and two Libyans accused of planting the bomb would not hand themselves over for trial.

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Police hunt murderer in Aqaba

By Rana Hussein

Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A 49-year-old man was found brutally murdered with a sharp weapon in his house in Aqaba, Thursday, and police are investigating the case, police and family sources said Friday.

The battered body of Marwan Mohammad Kabarti, a supermarket owner in Aqaba, was discovered by his brother, a police report said.

A close relative of the victim told the Jordan Times the victim's brother went to check on his brother in his shop in the morning but did not find him. The brother went to his home, and after knocking several times on the door he noticed some blood on the window, and reported the matter to the police.

"He was killed in a very brutal way, and the person who killed him must have tortured him before murdering him," the family member told the Jordan Times.

Furthermore, the source said there is a possibility that the killer/killers were in search of some money, because the victim usually takes the cash home instead of to the bank, and it is possible that the killer's aim was the money.

However, the source said, the thieves were unable to find the money and left empty handed.

The relative expressed shock and disbelief at the murder because he said the victim had no enemies, and was liked by everyone.

"It had to be money, because Marwan (the victim) was loved by everyone, and he was good to everybody," the relative said.

Meanwhile, in a separate incident, a man from Um Al Hiran district, south west of Amman, has been arrested for allegedly killing his two-year-old son, according to a police report.

One report indicated that the father had severely beaten his son before killing him with severe blows to the stomach, and neck.

It said the victim's 10-year-old sister informed the police about the incident which occurred nearly a month ago.

The police exhumed the body and apprehended the child's father.



Tourism Minister Mohammad Adwan awards certificates to the trainees

Graduation of mosaics restorers

AMMAN (J.T.) — A group of young Jordanians were awarded certificates Thursday by Tourism and Antiquities Minister Mohammad Affash Adwan at the completion of a training course in the techniques and methods of restoration and renovation of mosaics.

The two-month course was conducted by experts from the Madaba Mosaics School and funded by a grant of \$27,000 from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The graduation ceremony was held at Mount Nebel near Madaba, and was attended by Jordanian, U.S. and Italian government officials, the graduating students and their families.

Jordanians received practical training during the course by working on the cleaning, restoration and renovation of the mosaic floors in two Byzantine (5th/6th centuries) churches in Madaba: The Sunna Church and the Church of Al Khader. The students also renovated mosaic pavements which the Department of Antiquities has

had to remove from their original sites in Madaba and the surrounding area. These are now on display in the Madaba Archaeological Park.

Since 1991, USAID Jordan, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the American Centre for Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman have been actively cooperating in projects leading to cultural preservation.

The Madaba Mosaic School is administered jointly by the Jordanian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

HOME NEWS IN BRIEF

JTV presents morning programmes

AMMAN (Petra) — As of Thursday, Dec. 23, Jordan Television started morning broadcasts of programmes mainly directed at school children who have started a month-long mid-year holiday. A television statement said that programmes will start every day at 10 a.m. in the morning and run until 12 noon when a news bulletin will be presented.

Over 75,000 new persons apply for jobs

AMMAN (Petra) — The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has received 76,342 applications for employment as of the end of the November, according to the commission's statistical bulletin. The bulletin said the CSC appointed 8,933 applicants during the reporting period. The commission has granted scholarships to 205 government employees and involving 163 others in training course until the end of October, according to the bulletin.

ACC gave farmers JD148m of credits

AMMAN (Petra) — The Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) has granted JD148 million worth of loans to thousands of farmers in Jordan since its establishment. The loans were used to finance development projects, including land development and reclamation projects, planting fruitbearing trees, developing animal wealth, and purchasing agricultural equipment, according to ACC Director Mohammad Arabiyat. The corporation also invested JD1.2 million in public shareholding agricultural projects, he said.

Government prepares for Arbor Day

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan will celebrate Arbor Day on Jan. 15 at Wadi Al Qitar area in Abu Alanda. Ministry of Agriculture, in cooperation with Amman Municipality, is embarking on the necessary preparations. The selected site for this year's celebration is intended to be a national park. With a total area of 1247 dunums, the new "Al Hussein National Park" will be planted with 1,000 trees and will be equipped with drip irrigation system.

Major training programme under study

AMMAN (Petra) — The Civil Service Commission in cooperation with the Institute of Public Administration and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), will undertake a study on a training programme for senior level administrative staff. Gerald Graver, director of the top leadership training programme at Pittsburgh University, has arrived here recently on a two week assignment in Jordan to carry out the study.

IAF holds elections

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Islamic Action Front (IAF) held Majlis Shura elections Friday, only four days after an open split between party doves and hardliners threatened to create an unprecedented crisis.

Six of the party's seventeen-member executive committee resigned last Tuesday over a dispute involving the last minute inclusion of some 300 new applicants to the party's electoral list.

Hardliners wanted the inclusion of the new members while doves, led by IAF Secretary General Ishtak Farhan, did not.

After the last Majlis Shura, or central Committee, meeting of the year decided Thursday to hold the elections on time and postpone the inclusion of new members, the IAF leadership announced that the party would hold its second elections since the party was legalised, in December 1992, on Friday.

The Majlis has 120 seats, which are filled by any of the party's 2000 members. The IAF who said election results would be announced Saturday, said Friday that "most IAF members voted."

The Majlis is elected for a one year term.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab press daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation
Established 1975

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The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays.

Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

Hope for new spirit

THERE WAS hope only a few weeks ago that this year's Christmas in the Holy Land will be different from the past 26 years due to the breakthrough on the Palestinian-Israeli front as well as on other Arab tracks. That hope appears to have been shrinking, however, since even hoisting the Palestinian flag over the municipality building in Bethlehem has caused an Israeli furor. Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij had been promising full celebrations during this year's Christmas season as a dramatic sign that peace is well on its way. Needless to say the best Christmas gift that the peoples of the area could receive this year would be a real movement not only on the PLO-Israeli track but also on the other tracks affecting Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The recent endeavours in Oslo and Paris have taken place amid reports that a compromise is in the offing. Shared control over border crossings appears to be the basis of this compromise.

But the spirit of the season has yet to penetrate the psyche of the Israelis since they appear to cling to an outmoded security doctrine based on militarily secured frontiers. Perhaps with time Israel would work on its complexes about security, but till that happens there can be no genuine peace in the land of peace.

Jerusalem Roman Catholic Patriarch Michel Sabbah sensed the incompleteness of the peace process by stressing on the occasion of Christmas that Israel cannot hold to Jerusalem with utter disregard to Palestinian national rights in the holy city or the rights of the other two monotheistic faiths in it. "Jerusalem," he was quoted as saying Tuesday, "belongs to two nations, two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, and three religions. So we must find a special status for that which satisfies all these parties."

This position obviously irked the Rabin government which described the remarks of the Church on the future of Jerusalem as repugnant to the peace process altogether. At a time when the Vatican is embarking on a new policy towards the Jewish state including the prospects of establishing diplomatic relations with it, the least that we should expect from the Rabin government is more appreciation of the religious and national rights of others. Hopefully, the Pope would not press ahead with his new relations with Israel till there is a clearer manifestation of accommodation by the Jewish state of the points of view of other parties. Patriarch Sabbah summed up the situation when he said that "if Israelis want to have peace they must rethink it, and if they want reconciliation, if they want Jerusalem as they want it, a city of God, a city of reconciliation, they must change their mind."

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AL DUSTOUR daily commented on the killing of two Jewish settlers in the West Bank town of Ramallah by describing the settlers' presence amidst the Arab population as a time bomb ready to blow up at any time. Despite arrangements for the continued existence of settlements within the autonomy rule area in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, no one can deny that the settlements constitute a major threat to the whole peace process, said the paper. There is no doubt that the settlers' behaviour and the extremist Jewish groups' actions against the Palestinians lie behind the attack launched by the Palestinian freedom fighters two days ago, said the paper. It said that with the counterattack, the Palestinians have found the best and most proper means to reply to these extremist groups' actions in order to force the Rabin government to respond to the Arab demands of ending the occupation. Therefore, the paper added, the only means to end the bloodshed is withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories and immediate recognition of Palestinian rights. The paper said the Rabin government should stop being a victim of the abuses of the settlers and the extremist movements in Israel and ought to apply the peace deal to avoid further acts of violence.

A COLUMNIST in Sawt Al Shaab daily bitterly criticised the United States for its double standard policies in dealing with Israel and the rest of the countries of the world. Once again, Washington proves its total bias towards Israel, by opposing calls for its withdrawal from the occupied Arab land, said Salameh Ekour. The writer said that the United States, which has been exercising pressure on the Arab countries to maintain the U.N.-imposed sanctions on Iraq, has also been adamant in its position against any condemnation by the United Nations of Israel's aggression on Arab countries, supporting the Israeli government's intransigent policies and its refusal to comply with the requirements of a just peace, said the writer. He said that Washington's policies are bound to continue to serve Israel's interests rather than being of service to American interests. By taking decisions to serve Israel's interests, he added, the United States is encouraging the Jewish state to reject U.N. resolutions and to drive to maintain Israel's military superiority, he added. Criticising Washington's role as a supposedly peace mediator, the writer said that only when the United States exercise a neutral stand, it can be considered as a genuine peace mediator. He said it is regrettable to find the Palestinian leadership and the Arab governments still trusting Washington's policies accepting its suggestions and betting on U.S. Middle East policies.

Jordanian Perspective

By Dr. Musa Keilani

PLO should reconsider options, strategies in fight for ancestral land

THE LABOURED negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) are not simply a battle of political wits between an occupier and the occupied. By and large, the negotiations represent the tug-of-war between two peoples both of whom believe that they have undisputed historical rights to the land of Palestine. And the deadlock between them could be better understood if the negotiations are seen in the context of the sovereignty that the Palestinians are seeking and the Israelis are not willing to even acknowledge.

The Palestinians' negotiating position is based on the premise that they are making a historic compromise by simply agreeing to negotiate with Israel rather than continuing a war of total liberation aimed at eliminating the Jewish state that propped up in their land 45 years ago.

On the other hand, with Mr. Yitzhak Rabin and Mr. Shimon Peres leading Israel, the Israeli stands bases itself on a psychology that it is the Jewish state that is making a concession by negotiating with the Palestinians. For them, the creation of Israel in 1947/48 was only the culmination of a natural course of events.

While the Palestinian position could be easily understood, it might take a closer look to realise the underlying theory in the Israeli argument.

Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres and several others in the ruling Israeli circle belong to the Sabra segment of the Israeli society — those who were born and brought up with the notion that the land of Palestine is Jewish land and it was only a matter of time before the land is returned to the Jews.

For them, any acknowledgement of Palestinian sovereignty and independence immediately translates into an undermining of Israeli claims to sovereignty to the Biblical land. The belief is set into their life and blood.

It is also true that if Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres were in power in 1980, then the return of Egyptian territory under the Camp David agreement would have gone through a much laborious process than it actually did under Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Quite simply, it was easier for Mr. Begin, who was of Eastern European origin, to consider returning Egyptian territory to Egypt, but it would have been a very difficult decision for Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres to have done so, given their psychology that any such act would mean giving away part of Israel, particularly that several settlements had to be dismantled before the land was returned to Egypt.

Also relevant here is the call by a former chief rabbi on the Israeli army on soldiers to disobey orders, if they ever came, to dismantle the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. It would be naive to see the call simply as the expression of a fanatical extremist Jewish leader on his people to hold on to occupied land even if it meant a mutiny in the armed forces. It was an appeal by a religious leader to his people not to allow the return of what he staunchly believes as the land of Israel and the abandonment of not only Biblical land but also a home that was given to the Jews as a compensation for their sufferings in Europe.

Whether we like it or not, whether the Israeli argument has any international legitimacy or not, whether Mr. Rabin and Company are justified or not in their denial of Palestinian rights, the fact remains that given the geopolitics that govern the region

there is little else the Palestinians could do other than bargaining over their rights and making concessions after concessions.

It is clear that Israel today wants to pacify the Palestinians by extending some token gestures that imply the acceptance of their rights in the long term but any acknowledgement of their sovereignty is totally out of the question.

The "legal" argument that Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres are citing — that the Sept. 13 declaration of principles does not provide for Israel agreeing to any step that mean Palestinian sovereignty and that the future of the land has to be negotiated in three to five years from now — is only a smokescreen for the actual Israeli intentions.

Obviously, the Israeli leaders believe that once a Palestinian self-rule authority takes over the difficult job of keeping peace in the occupied territories, Israel can argue that it is on its way to eventually address the rights of the Palestinians. Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres have predetermined that there is not going to be any independent Palestinian state, now or ever if they could help it, but in the meantime, they want legitimacy for their country as an accepted member of the Middle East, and their objective remains to be domination of the region by working from within the system.

Augmenting the Israeli belief are strong signs that a majority in the Arab World does not really care what happens to the Palestinians' rights in the long run. By going it alone with Israel, the PLO has played into the hands of that majority, which is now armed with an argument that it is the funeral of the Palestinians, and the Arabs should not be expected to extend a helping hand.

No doubt, the realisation that the Arab World could not care less for the Palestinian fate played a major role in propelling the PLO into accepting the Oslo accord, hoping that it was only a matter of time that it would be able to wrench the required "concessions" from the Jewish state.

But what faces the PLO today is a formidable negotiator whose bottom lines were drawn decades ago and who has no intention of going beyond token steps implying that wider doors are open at a later stage.

Jordan is caught in the middle. It is strongly committed to a negotiated peace settlement with Israel, but it cannot and will not proceed unless such a settlement is intrinsically linked to the return of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It is not a political strategy or tactic; it is a belief and conviction stemming from its commitment to justice and fairness.

But Jordan is unable to extend a helping hand to the Palestinians in their battle with the Israelis if only because the Palestinians themselves have positioned themselves at a distance. Unless they reposition their stand and swing themselves into a position where they could accept Jordanian help, Jordan will remain unable to help them.

It is time for the PLO to stop in its tracks for a moment and reconsider its options and strategies; it might be a good thing for the organisation to realise and appreciate that the present stage in Middle East negotiations is too crucial to be undermined by narrow visions and unclear action and it is high time that it clears the atmosphere with its partners in the peace process.

Otherwise, the land of Palestine would be sacrificed at the altars of the Sabras of Israel.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

Disagreement over Oslo deal provisions adversely affects the peace process

Reviewed by Elia Nasrallah

IN THE past week, the local Arabic dailies gave prominence to the Middle East question, the PLO-Jordanian links and the PLO-Israeli Oslo deal, as well as inter-Arab relations and a host of domestic issues.

In discussing the implementation of the Oslo deal between the PLO and Israel, Al Dustour daily said that differences in views between the two sides are overshadowing the peace process and are bound to adversely affect the Middle East process and weaken the credibility of the PLO and Israeli leaderships.

The paper noted that the abuses of the Jewish settlers in the occupied Arab lands are responsible for the delay in implementation of the deal.

A columnist in Al Ra'i daily said that discussing the Oslo deal, does not, in any way, indicate going back on the Gaza and Jericho first agreement.

Tareq Masarweh said the PLO-Israeli differences focus on the interpretation of the provisions of that agreement, on the border with Jordan and Egypt and the extent of the areas from which the Israelis will withdraw, said the writer.

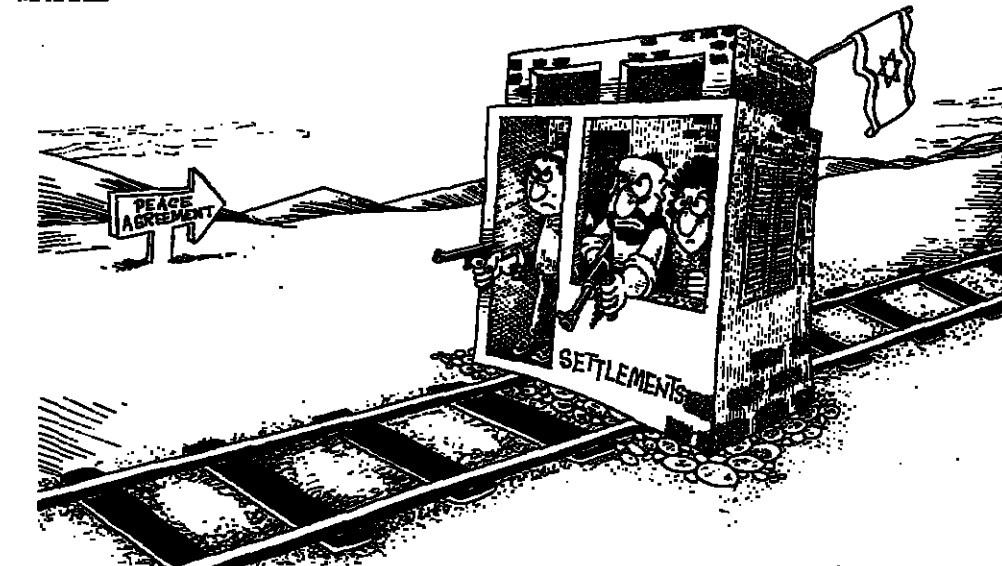
The Israelis' realisation that the question of security for the Jewish state is as vital as is the future of the city of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, said the writer, the Palestinians' control of the borders with Jordan and Egypt is considered by Israel as dangerous for the security of the Jewish state which considers it as a prelude to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Ibrahim Zarour, a columnist in Al Ra'i, said the leftist government in Israel has proved that it is no different from the extremist Israeli right.

Noting that the two sides have proved to be hostile towards the implementation of the deal, the writer said that the Rabin government,

M. KAHL



which is delaying the implementation of the deal is constricting the Israeli image towards peace and discouraging the optimistic groups involved in the Middle East peace process.

Another Al Ra'i columnist said that freezing the Oslo deal considered as doing less harm to the Palestinian cause than its implementation which favours Israeli interests.

Mahmoud Rimawi said the Arabs and the Palestinians have been hoping that the deal would open the way for the restoration of Arab rights, something which made the Palestinians hope they will regain their rights and the Arabs hope they will end the Israeli occupation of their homeland, but he said, that it is regrettable to find the Israelis holding adamant on to their rejection of a comprehensive peace.

Taher Udwan, a columnist in Al Dustour, expressed the view that no Arab government is interested in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The writer said that the Arab regimes, which for years have been advocating

the idea of liberating the Israel-held Arab lands, are now driving to promote the concept of peace only by advocating the idea of peace based on U.N. resolution 242 and not demanding the thorough implementation of U.N. resolutions.

Commenting on the question of Palestinian refugees, Fahed Al Faneh, a columnist in Al Ra'i, said that while initial estimates put the number of refugees and displaced people at 700,000, the number of refugee camps residents has proved to be no more than 150,000. The writer said that since the camps are close to the main cities, the latter have been transformed into their suburbs.

He noted that Jordan is home to three million and the Palestinians ought to be granted their wish to repatriation and allowed to return to their homeland. If they do wish to return, as long as the refugees are holding Jordanian passports, the Jordanian government bears responsibility for their fate, said the writer.

Referring to the sales tax, which the government insists on implementing at the beginning of 1994, a columnist in Sawt Al Shaab daily, said that the majority of the citizens do not know about the government plans which are known to the private sector's businessmen only.

Ahmad Dabbas said the merchants and manufacturers are not bound to suffer as a result of the tax, but the limited-income consumers will bear the brunt.

Improving living conditions of civil service employees lies in granting them salary increases, said Mohammad Daoud, a writer in Al Dustour daily.

The writer said that the low salaries have contributed to the drain of highly qualified personnel who resign in order to seek a higher salary in the private sector here and abroad.

Nazih Qusous, a columnist in Sawt Al Shaab, criticised Jerash municipality for failing to shoulder its duty towards its citizens. The writer said that Jerash is one of the main attractions for tourists, but now victim to the thousands of rats infesting the homes and the streets of the Greco-Roman city.

U.S. seeks support for tough position on Iraqi oil

By Evelyn Leopold Reuter

UNITED NATIONS — The United States has lobbied new U.N. Security Council members to convince them not to lift the oil embargo against Iraq until President Saddam Hussein's policies have changed toward Kuwait and on human rights, diplomats said.

By doing so, U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright is saying clearly what she has indicated all along: that Iraq's compliance with weapons requirements will not be enough to lift the oil sanctions imposed after Baghdad's troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

"If Iraq's behaviour in every other way demonstrates disdain or rejection, that will undermine the confidence we need to lift the oil embargo," a U.S. official said.

"Otherwise what happens to the weapons of mass destruction the day after we lift the embargo?" the official added.

While the United States, one of five permanent council members with veto power, can stop any lifting of sanctions, U.S. officials apparently want strong support for their view.

The U.S. official said Argentina, the Czech Republic, Nigeria, Oman and Rwanda had been approached both at the United Nations and in capitals as well as other key members of the council. The five nations become members of the 15-member council in 1994.

But Washington's public political interpretation of the 1991 Gulf war ceasefire resolution, which ties the oil embargo to weapons demands, is making the other four permanent council members uncomfortable. France and China have already voiced outright disagreement over the past few months.

France's Ambassador Jean-Bernard Merimee said he had "made it clear several times to

the council we are sticking to Resolution 687 as it is" and that position had not changed.

"Of course we recognise the necessity for Iraq to recognise the boundaries and the sovereignty of Kuwait but Resolution 687 is perfectly clear as far as the relationship between the oil embargo and the destruction of weapons."

British and Russian envoys were said to be uneasy that the issue was raised far in advance of when they will be forced to make a decision.

One British source said that Iraq's flouting of the border with Kuwait would figure into the "context of lifting the oil embargo." But he said that human rights demands might be more difficult as they were not part of Resolution 687.

To this end, the United States, France, Britain and Russia early in 1994 intend to protest to Iraq's Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun for his country's treatment of minority Kurds and Shiites as well as new political assassinations, including some from President Saddam Hussein's own village.

But that "doesn't mean that all the people who are making the demarche have signed up to a particular posture on the oil embargo," one key council envoy said.

The issue is still moot — the U.N. special commission in charge of dismantling Iraq's weapons does not expect to declare it is satisfied until at least six months after it begins a long-term monitoring programme in 1994.

Mr. Albright has told the council she wanted the monitoring programme, accepted by Iraq recently after almost two years of objections, to be tested for six to 12 months.

She also said in a New York Times interview that Saddam Hussein must give "clear evidence of respect for Kuwait's borders" and "show respect for his own people" by ending his blockade of the Kurds and his attacks against dissident Shiite Muslims.

Fear of the word

By Karim Alrawi

IT IS 9.30 at night. I am in the crowded reception room of the heavily guarded three-storey villa that is the Cairo interrogation centre for Egyptian State Security. The room is full of anxiously waiting students. On one wall is a large picture of Hosni Mubarak, sole candidate in Egypt's recent presidential elections.

I am led to an office on the top floor of the building. More framed photographs of President Mubarak adorn the walls. There are three plain-clothes officers waiting for me. One of them snaps at me to sit down. He introduces himself as Major Mahmoud Rifat.

I ask why I have been called in. The major tells me to shut up. He glances through my file. "What's your full name and date of birth?" he demands. "My name is on the file," I reply. He starts to shout and cuss at me. He asks the question again. I reply as before. He hurries my file to the floor. "You'll tell me everything," he yells as he hammers on the desk with the palm of his hand.

I ask him to proceed with due respect for the law. He scoffs: "What law? There is no law. I am the law." He rips up the papers on his desk and throws them on the floor. He threatens to call in the soldiers standing in the hall: "I'll show you what I can do to you," he yells.

The major demands to know what my religion is. I refuse to answer any questions until I am told what the charges are against me. He starts shouting at me: "Pray for the prophet. To which every Muslim should reply: 'God's prayers and peace be upon him.' He leans forward, his face in mine, shouting: 'Pray for the prophet. Pray for the prophet.' I feel like a part of me has dissociated itself from the proceedings and is looking down from a height at a scene from an old movie.

The demand for personal details continues. Fearing to have my Egyptian identity papers confiscated, I show him my faculty card for Iowa State University where I was Writer in Residence for two years.

The effect is immediate. The officer sitting behind me gets up and leaves the room. The second officer smiles ingratiatingly. "This is getting out of hand," he says. "There's

obviously been a mistake." I realise now they think I am an American citizen. That would be bad news for the interrogating officer. The U.S. government carries significant influence commensurate with its massive aid programme to Egypt.

The major is now down on his knees collecting the scattered papers. "Look what you've made me do," he sighs. "The universities are aflame and you have to pick today to give me a hard time."

I ask again about the charges. He tells me it is alleged I made derogatory statements about Egypt at a diplomatic party. Though I made no such remarks it is easy to identify the informer. There was only one other Egyptian at that party. For most of it he was drunk on Campari and gin. "He is not a reliable source, anyway," says the Major dismissively.

I ask him if I can leave now. "No," he says. He smiles deferentially. There is another file. He looks it up and then reads from it out loud. This time the charge is "being disrespectful to Islam." The major shows me an article I wrote about the assassination of the Egyptian human rights activist, Dr. Farag Fouda, by Islamic militants. He tells me I should not write about such matters and that I should avoid writing in the foreign press. In fact, he says, it would be better if I just stopped writing altogether.

There is yet a third file. It is about my wife. The Guardian correspondent in Egypt. "Look through her archives," he says. "She is bound to have a list of her sources. Just let me have a name. With one name I can close the file. It wouldn't be nice if I have to call her in."

So I am required to spy on my wife. I am also asked to name Egyptians who meet with the foreign press. I refuse to name any names. "Think about it," he says. "Drop round in a few days for a chat. Bring me some of your plays to read."

As I leave I pass the line of students waiting to be interrogated. Along the main road, the large posters of President Mubarak proclaim: "Mubarak is democracy. Mubarak is freedom. Mubarak is the future."

The writer is an Egyptian playwright. This article reprinted from the Guardian.

Briton invented the Christmas card 150 years ago

By Henri Bouvier
Agence France Presse

LONDON — It is 150 years since Henry Cole, a young British civil servant, sent the world's first Christmas card, beginning a tradition which has mushroomed into a multi-million pound industry.

Cole (1808-1882) asked one of his friends, an artist called John Calcott Horsley to design a card which he had 1,000 copies printed. The card, a lithograph coloured by hand, showed a bourgeois family celebrating Christmas, drinks in hand, and giving alms to the poor.

Cole sent out all he needed and gave the remainder to a Bond Street shop which put them on sale at one shilling and five pence each — quite a high price in a day when a shilling could buy a good meal in a London cafe.

Fifteen examples of the first card have survived to this day and are on show until January 9 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Cole's idea rapidly caught on among those who previously had sent their Christmas wishes just by letter.

Today, Britons send 1.55 billion cards a year — a market estimated to be worth £24 million (\$39 million).

In Britain, Christmas cards are also status symbols and image-makers for public figures and prominent firms as well. The royal family's cards are the object of particular attention in this respect.

Up to last year, the Prince and Princess of Wales sent a joint card bearing both their signatures and a photograph of the family.

In December 1992 after their separation was announced, they still sent out a joint card but only with a photo of their two children Princes William and Harry.

This year, Prince Charles and Princess Diana have sent separate cards. Princess Diana sent one with a photo of herself and her children signed only by herself. Prince Charles sent a card showing a watercolour by himself of their home in Sutherland with the mention: residence of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Some public figures try to be funny like Chief Treasury Secretary Michael Portillo, a

supporter of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who sent a card this year with a caricature of himself dressed as a bull-fighter (he is of Spanish origin) about to kill a bull named "budget deficit".

Sometimes the humour is unintended like the card sent last year by the British Tourist Board. It showed an impressionist painting by Camille Pissarro representing...Paris.

The smallest Christmas card ever sent was probably the grain of rice received in 1929 by the future Edward VIII. He had to use a microscope to read the message. Undoubtedly the most expensive was sent 80 years ago by an Indian prince. It was made entirely of ivory and showed nearly 10,000 scenes of the life of Buddha. It cost £500,000 at the time.

Ron Parkinson, the organiser of the Victoria and Albert Exhibition said however that the future of the Christmas card might be jeopardised. Early next century, he said people would be able to design their own cards on the computer and fax them direct to relatives and friends.



Is the Christmas card's future jeopardised by the electronic industry? Today, Britons alone send 1.55 billion cards a year. What can beat that?

Serbian pensioners fight losing battle with inflation

By Jovan Kovacic
Reuters

BELGRADE — They queue before dawn outside Belgrade grocery stores and wait for hours — some mute, others vociferous — to buy their meagre daily ration of bread and milk.

Some collapse and die while waiting. Every second day for the past three months one of them has committed suicide, giving up the personal battle for survival against hyperinflation.

They are Serbia's pensioners, a corps of several hundred thousand elderly people, most of whom have to live on about \$15 a month in a country where a kilo of meat costs \$3 and

daily inflation is 20 per cent. "Every cent counts, every cent," says 73-year-old Milan. "Early morning the stores get cheaper bread costing 300 dinars. It doesn't even make it to the shelf before being grabbed. The bread that comes later in the day costs 200 dinars more."

Stiff U.N. economic sanctions. Imposed against Belgrade for its role in Bosnia, have crippled Serbia's economy and crushed welfare and social security programmes.

Average monthly wages now total \$20 and have reduced most of Serbia's 10 million population to below subsistence levels.

The hardest hit, officials say, are urban pensioners and war veterans. They are either left to fend for themselves with their meagre income or rely on the charity of relatives.

"If I did not have a brother living on a farm in Arandjelovac I would have been long gone," says Petar. "I have money only to buy milk and bread and an occasional tomato and that is it. My brother supplies the rest."

Another said he juggled his bank account.

"The bank is charitable, it is turning a blind eye to my overdraft, but God help me when it hits me with interest rates," he said.

A third pensioner standing in the same queue said the banks could never crack down

on the many overdrafts run up by customers. "They would have to put all of Belgrade in jail," he said.

A retired university professor begs not to be named because he has many friends abroad. "Understand it is not that I am ashamed of myself — I did the best I can. I am ashamed of my country for letting us down this way."

He says his pension cannot cover his family's needs. "I occasionally sell family paintings, furniture. It helps, and it never ceases to surprise me how many people do have large sums of money to spend."

Another pensioner, who gives his name as Pero, points to three carelessly parked luxury cars. "The cost of petrol for these monsters would keep

me going for a year."

They are desperate and full of venom against the authorities, but none show any signs of wanting to march in protest.

"What is the use?" asks Pero. "There is a war on, sanctions, and what would be the use anyway, we would no power anyway."

He sighs: "Do you really think we could do anything against this new ruling class, do you think that those people who have grown rich off the misery of millions would let us do anything?"

Djordjica, 83, gets only \$10 a month.

"I have not seen any meat in months. I am still healthy, more or less, but if I had to pay even for an aspirin, I would have no money to survive this month," she says.

A refugee from the predominantly ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo, where she says she had to flee Albanian harassment in the 1980s before the Serbian crackdown there, Djordjica lives in an unheated basement room.

She said she was quite well off after she sold an eight-room house in the Kosovo town of Pec for a "good amount" of German marks and came to Belgrade. She deposited the money in a bank and her old age seemed secure until it defaulted on foreign currency savings three years ago.

Now she sees no way to get through this winter.

"I absolutely do not have a penny for firewood or coal," she said, adding: "I don't even have the money to have my old stove repaired."

Djordjica has two sons who she said once had quite good jobs in Germany. "They got laid off months ago, they are Serbs. They are now more or less illegal aliens there, and can send me no money."

The reason? "Sanctions, son, sanctions," she explains. "There are no money transfers now and all of their friends do not want to leave Germany in fear of being prevented to reenter. There is no one to bring me money from them."

She says she gets by resting most of the day. "I conserve my energy. I spend most of my day in bed, moving as little as possible."

She has contemplated suicide many times. "But it would bring shame on my sons," she sighs. "It is just not the way to go."

Scientist confirms origin of Easter islanders

By Erick Monod
Agence France Presse

HANGA ROA, Easter Island — A small bone pendant shaped like a harpoon head has provided the key for archeologists to confirm the origins of Easter Islanders, long a subject of debate.

Professor Yoshinori Sino, from Bishop Museum in Honolulu, believes the four-centimetre long pendant found on the island indicates almost conclusively that the original inhabitants of the island came from Polynesia's Marquesas Islands around 500 A.D.

Prof. Sino is one of the world's leading authorities on the South Pacific.

Standing in the museum at Hanga Roa, the capital and only town on Easter Island, said the pendant was similar to others found in the Marquesas Islands.

So as not to overload their canoes, Polynesian sailors used to create small replicas of everyday items which they then took with them to provide a model on which to reproduce the items when they arrived at their destination.

The pendant, which dates from around the time the first people are believed to have landed on the island, would have been just such a model, he said.

"This object, added to all the other pieces in our possession, appears to be the proof we were looking for to establish conclusively the origins of the islanders."

The irony is that the pendant was discovered during recent digs by Swedish ethnologist Thor Heyerdahl, who has long defended the controversial theory that the islanders are descended from South Americans.

But the pendant adds to a body of evidence which appears to support the Polynesian origins including a similar language, a common oral tradition, physical similarities and a cultural and artistic heritage similar to Marquesas Islanders.

The only beach on Easter Island, where the first canoes are believed to have landed after a voyage of more than 4,000 kilometres, has the same name, Anakena, as a valley in Hiva-Oa Island in the southern part of the Marquesas Archipelago. Prof. Sino said.

The first European explorers also described the islanders as being tall and fair complexioned like Polynesians. Research on skeletons has shown that 40 per cent have characteristics common among Polynesians, he added.

Tools also bear striking resemblances, while art has come from a common base but evolved into two different styles, the Marquesas through the use of tattoos and the Easter islanders with stone carving.

"Origins were exclusively Polynesian, even if later contacts provide for the introduction of plants, tools and building techniques from Latin America," he concluded.

Paris homeless sell self-help idea worth paper it's printed on

By Claire Rosemberg
Reuters

PARIS — As another bleak winter of recession and unemployment sets in, a new self-help business is booming in France — newspapers produced and sold by an army of destitute and homeless social outcasts.

"People would rather buy our paper than have us rob or beg," said Christophe Mourry, orphaned at 17 and alone in the world with no job, no home and a fledgling criminal record.

Since Mr. Mourry joined a legion of homeless newspaper-sellers now peopling the streets and subways of Paris, the rangy 24-year-old can sleep in a hotel — albeit dingy — eat, wash and fantasise about embarking on the road to a fresh start.

"I can survive now, earn an honest living, and not beg — anything is better than begging."

Four papers sold by the homeless for the homeless have appeared in France since the summer. Whether out of pity, curiosity, guilt or fear, their sales are growing faster than those of glossy news magazines.

Nearly 3.3 million people are unemployed. According to a public opinion poll published this month by one of the homeless magazines — La Rue (the street) after those who walk them and sleep on them — 55 per cent of French people believe they too will be turned out to roam the roads some day.

That fear is shared by two-thirds of the under-50s.

No one knows exactly how many people are homeless in France but charity groups say 400,000 sleep rough and more than five million live on the fringes.

Like Mr. Mourry, most homeless vendors are young, with sad histories of broken homes and disrupted childhoods.

They tell devastating tales of life on the edge of society: pregnant women sleeping on pavements because of lack of shelter, 15 people frozen to death since cold in settled in mid-November, cockroaches in soup kitchens, lice in hostel beds, brutality.

In the biggest Paris suburban shelter for the destitute, inmates eat with their fingers because utensils are banned on grounds of safety. A single

cloth is passed around for washing. Toilets have no paper, the place stinks and robbery is rife.

"Times are worse now than last century," said George Mathis, a 60-year-old former tramp who founded Le Reverber (the street lamp), current bestseller of the homeless press. "People should help their fellows. Meantime, we're helping ourselves."

For Mr. Mourry and 1,200 other officially badged Le Reverber vendors, the day starts near a truck parked at the Gare de Lyon railway station.

Popol, a big Belgian with a dried-out alcoholic's swollen and mottled face, stands guard over piles of Le Reverber, handing out stacks of 10s and 100s to the waiting queue of scrubbed if slightly down-at-heel men and women.

"The paper was set up to feed the hungry," Mr. Mathis told Reuters. "So people could live like human beings, not animals."

An Arab man, his wife and three small children take 100. A 38-year-old former truck-driver takes 50. Mr. Mathis said most have changed beyond belief since they were plucked by the wayside. "They were filthy, in rags, some hadn't eaten for days. Several vomited at their first meal."

He claims their new-found respectability to be responsible for a drop in petty crime in Paris.

Each vendor must be sponsored and spoken for by another, pledging to keep off drink and drugs while selling and not to insult the public. Any breach leads to the loss of the vendor's badge.

They pay Mr. Popol three francs (50 cents) a paper and sell it for 10 francs (\$1.65), pocketing the profit. Should they need a pay-as-you-go card for health and welfare, they pay 4.50 francs.

"I'm saving money to look for a job," said Mr. Mourry. "This is a transition, a bridge for the future, a way out."

Because he has no job, he cannot rent a room so he spends 4,000 francs (\$660) a month on hotel rooms, more than an average bank clerk or schoolteacher might pay for accommodation.

Outcasts, along with the organisations that support them, blame the government for failing to provide cheap housing, the system for failing to look after the destitute and



Homeless people like this in France, look fate in their hands and started producing newspapers

the economy for galloping unemployment, at a postwar record 12 per cent. The government has pledged more homes and shelters but the homeless, sceptical of officialdom, are increasingly taking matters into their own hands.

With its profits, Le Reverber plans to buy and upgrade three broken-down barges to be converted into washrooms, laundries, a restaurant and rooms for the homeless.

The newest, glossiest and most readable of the four papers, La Faim du Siecle (a pun on "end of the century" and "the century's hunger"), says its aim is to breathe new life into old trades, such as selling papers on the street, which had died.

"We are not just a paper for the homeless," said founder and editor Marc Thommyre. "We aim to fight unemployment and help all those in need."

There is bitter rivalry among the four publications.

Mr. Mathis started on the first homeless newspaper in France, the Belgian-owned tabloid Macadam, which appeared in May. He quit saying they had no plan to help the destitute.

"At Le Reverber we're all from the streets, real beggars,

real homeless," said Mr. Mathis, criticising the competition for using professional reporters and institutional funding.

A former truck-driver, he dropped out to sleep on deserted river barges seven years ago. His friend Jo Beltran, in charge of sales, was an oil engineer until he slipped into drink and his marriage broke up. He still has the shakes.

The paper's layout man slept in cardboard boxes with his dog until he met Mr. Mathis, and vendor Didier Benavente, 34, drifted on to the streets when 15 years of casual labour dried up.

Early this month they all came together in the first street march organised in Paris by the homeless. "We want roofs," they chanted. "This is 1993, it's intolerable."

(Continued from page 1)

history of our national struggle, the beginning of the end of Israeli occupation of our land," he said.

"We are now at the heart of a process to build our renaissance country, and to set up our

Four years after revolution, life is an icy street

By Mark J. Porubcansky
The Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania — Four years after the revolution, Bucharest's icy streets are a metaphor for post-communist life: a few people zip ahead, but many tread carefully, looking no farther than the next footstep.

Valentina Lupan, a 42-year-old architect, has enough energy for the fast lane, but is plodding nonetheless.

Ms. Lupan helped build a gargantuan palace that was dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's monument to himself. But she also hoped for change, and took to the streets in the revolution that overthrew him in December 1989.

Today, Ms. Lupan has virtually no work as an architect, and like many other residents of Bucharest is short of heat and water. She sits in a chilly apartment, fishing designs out of fashion magazines and sewing dresses for the wives of former functionaries who knew when to jump Ceausescu's sinking ship.

She laughs at her former naivete and scolds herself for passivity, which she sees as a national affliction.

"Passivity is bringing the death of a nation," Ms. Lupan said. "I am passive. I don't get involved. I laugh."

Life may be hard for most Romanians, but some are getting rich. For all its problems, the new Bucharest is a livelier, richer place than Ceausescu's beaten-down capital.

Jazz clubs, bars and restaurants cater to rich locals and foreigners. Soot is being stripped from some of the lovely old buildings in the city once known as the Paris of the East.

Mercedes and BMW sedans share the streets with battered Romanian Dacias. Shop windows display western appliances that cost months of an average wage.

On Nov. 2, President Clinton signed legislation restoring most-favoured-nation trading status, citing Romania's "significant progress" in rejoining the community of democratic nations.

Romania also has joined the Council of Europe, but still seems to be going nowhere economically.

Two reform-minded premiers, Petre Roman and Theodor Stolojan, pushed through painful legislation in 1990-1991 that lifted most price subsidies, started land redistribution and offered a blueprint for privatisation.

In September 1992, however, Romanians reelected their go-slow president, Ion Iliescu, and he chose the Finance Ministry's tax man, Nicolae Vacaroiu, as premier.

Mr. Vacaroiu is unpopular and can look forward to becoming more so. Despite Mr. Iliescu's pledge of less pain, the premier has to implement policies approved by his predecessors: imposing a national sales tax and lifting what price controls remain.

But Mr. Vacaroiu appears to have no strategy for reform and international lenders want more of it than he and Mr. Iliescu are offering. They are withholding vital loans until Romania liberalises currency exchanges, passes bankruptcy laws and makes other changes.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed has reached 1 million, 9.4 per cent of the work force, and annual inflation is more than 300 per cent. The average monthly wage equals \$N3. A loaf of bread, at 13 cents, costs six times what it did Jan. 1. Gasoline prices have risen 60 per cent in two months.

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Mr. Vacaroiu, who owns a construction company and represents the Liberal Party in parliament, said inflation is out of control because Mr. Iliescu, fearing social unrest, continues to subsidise money-losing state factories.

"If they don't close them, they won't succeed in ending this nightmare," he said.

Mr. Patriciu pins his hopes on rural people, almost half of Romania's 23 million citizens, and their growing sense of proprietorship on private farms.

Ion Cristoiu, editor of Evenimentul Zilei, the main Bucharest daily, said the new politics confuses a population emerging from communism.

Unions support capitalism, a left-wing premier is forced to make conservative reforms, the conservative opposition supports union strikes, "and in the middle," Mr. Cristoiu said, "you have the average person, who doesn't understand anything."

Oliviu Gherman, president of senate and a leader of Iliescu's social Democracy Party, contends that opposition carping has polarised society.

"This is an extraordinarily dangerous climate that doesn't push the economy ahead," he said. "Any quick progress means some sacrifice — sacrifice that must be accepted by the population."

But the only things that give many Romanians hope are payouts from a dubious pyramid scheme called Caritas, and Romania's chances of winning the soccer World Cup next year.

The fact that millions put their money into Caritas shows that "they want hope, and that tells you about politics," Mr. Cristoiu said.

In the view of Ion Ratiu, a legislator from the opposition Peasants' Party, "people are afraid of change, but they are realising that life is changing and it's getting worse."

Romania is simply stuck, said Ms. Lupan, the sewing architect: "It's not making any progress. It's not getting any better, but I don't want it to go back, either."

"Maybe that's just how it's meant to be."

Palestinians win 'battle of flags' in Bethlehem

(Continued from page 1)

structures and institutions in all walks of life," Mr. Arafat said.

"We implore the Almighty to make next year a year of peace and prosperity for our people and for all the peoples of the region," he said.

"We hope to pray together next year in the church of the birthplace (of Jesus Christ) in Bethlehem."

Mr. Freij Friday joined colleagues from the neighbouring Christian villages of Beit Lahaj and Beit Sahur at the entrance to Bethlehem to welcome the Latin patriarch, Monsignor Michel Sabbah.

Manger Square was packed with pilgrims, as hundreds of

soldiers stood guard.

A boy scout leader, George Zeineh, said before marching in the square on Friday: "For 26 years we have been living under Israel... it is always thinking of force. We believe if Mr. Rabin wants to make peace he must change his and his soldiers' ways."

"Origins were exclusively Polynesian, even if later contacts provide for the introduction of plants, tools and building techniques from Latin America," he concluded.

Tools also bear striking resemblances, while art has come from a common base but evolved into two different styles, the Marquesas through the use of tattoos and the Easter islanders with stone carving.

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De Beers reports record sales of diamonds

LONDON (AP) — The sparkle may be back in the diamond market. The De Beers group has said it sold \$4.37 billion in rough stones this year, shattering records as the industry rebounded from a six-year low in 1992.

The value of diamonds sold by the De Beers Central Selling Organisation (CSO) was up by 28 per cent over sales of \$5.42 billion last year. The previous record of \$4.17 billion came in 1988.

The rising sales by the London-based CSO were attributed mostly to a strong first-half performance, when De Beers reported a 42 per cent

increase over the first six months of 1992. But analysts pointed out that the jump may have been exaggerated because the previous year had been so bad.

The hard times in 1992 had prompted diamond cutters and retailers to hold off on restocking. When they began replenishing their supplies early this year, sales boomed.

One analyst, Michael Spriggs of the London financial house S.G. Warburg, predicted modest growth of diamond sales in 1994 amid a sluggish global economy that has hampered sales of polished diamonds in Japan, the top

retail market in terms of value. The United States is the no. 1 retail market by volume.

World diamond consumption probably won't show any dramatic improvement until 1995, Mr. Spriggs said.

Although many mining analysts had said over the summer that De Beers would probably set records for the year, Mr. Spriggs said De Beers had sold far more diamonds than he and others predicted.

"What this actually means is open to question," Mr. Spriggs said. "There is quite a lot of room for massaging the numbers."

De Beers, which releases few details of its business, raised eyebrows in London's financial community last year when Chairman J. Ogilvie Thompson made an unusual bullish sales forecast that did not pan out.

During 1993, De Beers said, retail jewelry sales have held firm amid a staggering world economy. But the low end of the diamond market shows signs of oversupply because of sales from Russia and U.S. stockpiles that had been built up for industrial and technical use.

Mr. Spriggs said retail sales

have suffered the most among purchasers of small diamonds.

"The 1-carat-plus end of the market, the person who's semi-immune from the recession, is holding up pretty well," Mr. Spriggs said.

At the end of 1992, De Beers found itself holding onto a big stockpile of the gems, which it valued at \$3.77 billion. Despite the glut, De Beers raised prices by 1.5 per cent early this year.

De Beers won't immediately say how big the stockpile is at the end of 1993, but the group has apparently been cutting back on its supply by limiting its purchases from diamond

mines at the same time sales are on the rise.

In 1992, a brief wave of diamond poaching in Angola prompted De Beers to buy millions of illegally mined gems so they wouldn't end up on the market at low prices. As the De Beers supply mushroomed and sales stagnated, the group cut its producers to 75 per cent of their previous quotas.

This has now been increased to 85 per cent of the old quotas, Mr. Spriggs predicted. The lower quotas might be abolished in the coming year before the CSO attempts further price increases.

China says new taxes more fair

BEIJING (R) — China's top tax collector has promised sweeping tax reforms will not cause inflation and will give a better deal to state firms and the poor when they take effect next month.

The People's Daily quoted Jin Xin, director of the State Administration of Tax, as saying taxes on state firms will drop from current rates that run as high as 55 per cent to 33 per cent — the same as foreign-invested firms pay.

Mr. Jin said industrial and commercial taxes, part of the package approved by the State Council (Cabinet) for Jan. 1 effect, will fall from 32 per cent to 18 per cent.

Private, collective and foreign-owned firms, with lighter tax burdens, have rapidly gained market share at the expense of state firms.

China's 13,000 large — and

medium-size state firms account for only 2.6 per cent of all companies in the country but produce 46 per cent of national output and pay 67 per cent of taxes.

The reforms also include new taxes on land and real estate transactions, natural resources, the stock exchange, social insurance, inheritances and donations.

A new consumption tax on 11 goods — including tobacco, liquor, cosmetics, jewellery, petrol and cars — will not be inflationary, Mr. Jin said, because it will replace other taxes and overall prices will not rise.

The income gap is also widening, officials estimate 4.3 million "rich" people earn 30,000 yuan (\$5,260) a year, against an average urban income of 1,826 yuan (\$320) a year, and a rural average of 784 yuan (\$138) in 1992.

Pakistan to tax powerful landowners

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — A tax increase on the wealthy landowners could help Pakistan secure a much needed foreign loan, but a government official acknowledged Thursday that the tax plan will be hard to sell.

"It will have to be marketed. We know, it is going to be hotly debated and some will try to make political capital out of

it," said Zafar Altaf, agriculture ministry spokesman.

Some financial analysts say Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has no choice but to raise taxes if Pakistan is to get a \$1.3 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

Harry Snoek, IMF representative in Pakistan, said an agriculture tax is more a sym-

bolic gesture than a big revenue generator.

By taxing big landowners, the government is demonstrating that it is ready to satisfy international financial backers and tax the wealthy, said Mr. Snoek.

Very few people pay taxes in Pakistan. Most of those who do are salaried workers who earn about \$400 a year.

Landowners, who run the country, are expected to resist a tax increase. Ms. Bhutto and her family own large amounts of land, and many members of parliament also are landowners.

"We're trying to break a mental block. We're trying to change a mind set," said Mr. Altaf. "They (landers) have to be convinced that everybody

has to contribute to the country."

Ms. Bhutto's predecessor, Moeen Qureshi, a retired World Bank employee, tried to push the tax through by way of an ordinance, which expires Jan. 2 unless passed by the national assembly.

Mr. Altaf said the ordinance will lapse, but tax legislation will be introduced to the

national assembly in about a month, before the IMF meets in February to decide on Pakistan's loan.

Ms. Bhutto set up a task force after her election last October to look at the agriculture tax. The body submitted a report on Wednesday that recommended exempting small farmers and taxing large ones, explained Mr. Altaf.

Report: French arms industry likely to shrink

PARIS (R) — France's arms industry may have to shed more than one in three jobs over the next four years because of shrinking post-cold war markets, a state body has said.

The General Planning Commission, which advises the government on long-term planning, said in a report France needed to focus on essential weapons and would be unable to finance all its arms programmes over the next few years.

The commission said 24 crucial sectors, including nuclear weapons and missiles, should remain in France hands.

But the costs of industrial reconversion, modernisation of the armed forces and probable peacekeeping operations would hit the defence budget, it said.

The commission said France would have to revise its doctrine of an independent defence and concede that some non-essential programmes should be left to better placed Western partners.

It said the arms industry, which has lost 80,000 jobs over the past decade and now employs some 330,000 people, would have to cut between 58,800 and 131,800 jobs by 1997.

A favourable envisaged markets shrinking five per cent this year and growing by five per cent a year from 1995. In the worst case, markets were seen shrinking five per cent this year and 10 per cent a year over the next three years.

Analysts expect upward pressure on yen next year

Overview

Fundamental view: The dollar has stalled around the DM 1.70 level in thin year-end trading but has crept up to 111 yen in response to political uncertainty and stock market problems in Japan. We maintain our political target of DM/USD 1.85 based on our expectation of a sharp drop in European interest rates next year and possible monetary tightening by the Fed. In view of Japan's fragile stock market, further yen weakness would not be surprising in the near term against a backdrop of firm growth in the U.S. We expect upward pressure on the yen to reemerge next year with Japan's current account surplus likely to remain large relative to private sector capital outflows from Japan.

Technical view: The U.S. dollar was strong against most major currencies during the week ended Dec. 1, as it posted gains against six of the seven currencies we regularly discuss; the Australian dollar was the top currency that managed to post a week-to-week gain against the greenback. Nonetheless, short term momentum for the dollar index remains weak, medium term oscillators may be peaking, sentiment remains overbought. All of this suggests, that while some strength is still possible over the near term, the medium term outlook probably favours the currencies. Resistance for the dollar index is indicated at 97.50-98.00. Nearby support is just above 94.00.

Japanese yen

Fundamental view: The dollar has advanced to the yen 111 level in thin year-end trading in response to mounting political uncertainty in Japan and more negative news on Japan's economy. With the U.S. economy likely to have posted growth in the 4% to 5% range in the fourth quarter, while Japan's economy remains mired in recession, trends in short-term interest rates suggest the possibility of further yen weakness in the near term. Our U.S. analysts now expect the Fed to push short-term interest rates up 50 to 60 basis points next year, ending the period of very easy monetary policy.

In contrast, Japan is expected to cut its official discount rate by 50 basis points sometime soon to an historic low of 1.25% in response to continued economic weakness and financial market fragility.

Although Japan recently reported annualised growth of real GDP of 2% in the third quarter, other data depicts pronounced economic weakness. Industrial production in October plunged 5% from the previous month, the sharpest monthly decline since the 1930. The diffusion index of leading indicators also fell to 30% in October, suggesting further weakness ahead. With U.S. officials expressing concern about the recent weakening of the yen and Japan's cyclical problems, U.S.-Japan trade tensions could flare again in the new year.

Based on our view that Japan's current account surplus will fall only marginally next year to \$125 billion from \$137 billion this year, we expect upward pressure on the yen to eventually resurface, despite low interest rates in Japan. We look for the yen to move to the 105 and 100 levels against the dollar over the next 6 and 12 months respectively.

Technical view: The Japanese yen lost 1.0% against the U.S. dollar last week, making it the weakest of the six currencies we regularly review. Nonetheless, short term momentum did not confirm the weakness, medium term momentum appears to be bottoming (a rally through 108 JY/US\$ would do much to complete the bottoming process), and sentiment remains near its most constructive readings of the year. Thus, the prospects for improved relative strength in coming weeks still appear to be good. While we may have to allow for a decline to the 113 area, we still believe that the stage is being set for a resumption of the Yen's underlying uptrend. Such a resumption would allow for at least a test of the high to date near 100.

Deutschmark

Fundamental view: The dollar has stalled at the DM 1.70 level in thin year-end trading but we continue to expect further dollar strength in coming months. Estimates of real GDP growth in the U.S. of 4% to 5% in the current quarter have many U.S. analysts looking for the Fed to boost interest rates in the first half of next year, although the sharp decline in oil prices and political resistance could delay a tightening move. In contrast, German interest rates are likely to fall steadily next year in response to economic weakness and moderating inflation. The Bundesbank left rates steady in December, but we expect another 0.5% cut in official interest rates in January. Unexpectedly high money growth of 7.2 in November may have contributed to the bank's decision to delay easing until January. The bank may also wish not to appear "soft" ahead of new year's labour negotiations early next year, especially since CPI inflation is still running at a 3.6% rate on a year-to-year basis. The German economy posted positive growth in the second and third quarters of 1993, but rising taxes are expected to depress consumer spending early next year, setting the stage for another year of weak overall growth in 1994.

Against that backdrop, we continue to expect German short-term interest rates to fall by about 200 basis points from current levels to 4.0% by the end of next year. With our U.S. analysts expecting U.S. short-term rates to rise to the 3.75% to 4.0% range over the course of next year, Germany's short-term interest rate advantage should basically disappear, even as its labour costs remain far out of line from an international perspective.

Accordingly, there should eventually be little reason for the Deutschmark to retain any overvaluation against its estimated

purchasing power parity value, which we put in the range of DM 1.85 to DM 1.90. We continue to look for the dollar to reach DM 1.80 and DM 1.85 over the next six and 12 months respectively.

Technical view: The Deutschmark fell 0.6% versus the U.S. dollar last week. However short term momentum is constructive and sentiment is viewed as oversold. Thus, while medium term momentum remains down, there appears to be ample room for a potentially meaningful counter trend rally, with resistance for the currency indicated at 1.65-1.66 DM/US\$. However, with the dominant trend remaining weak, surprises are likely to be to the downside, and an eventual decline to 1.75 and beyond remains a reasonably strong probability.

The Mark/yen cross has moved back through the 65 area. Short term momentum has struggled to confirm this recent strength. However, there is strong resistance near current levels and medium term momentum remains weak. This, plus potential medium term strength in the yen, suggests that the foundation for a second leg of decline in the cross — with a possible test of the August lows below 40 — is being laid.

Pound sterling

Fundamental view: The pound was little changed this week, edging up a cent to 1.49 US\$ and holding steady at DM/2.54. We continue to project a rising pound versus the currencies of continental Europe. We expect another 50 basis point cut in the base rate this spring, but this is much smaller than our forecast of a 200 basis point decline in short-term continental European rates by the end of 1994.

As a result, we look for the pound to appreciate to DM/2.60 in 12 months. We continue to expect the pound to depreciate to US\$/1.41 in 12 months as U.S. short-term interest rates rise by 50 to 75 basis points by the end of 1994.

Technical view: The British pound last 0.5% versus the U.S. dollar last week. Sentiment has deteriorated a bit, but remains near oversold levels. Momentum has been weak of late and, from current levels, would require a rally back through 1.52 US\$ to turn back up. The support/resistance focal points remain unchanged: A break down through \$1.46-\$1.47 would imply a potential test of important long term support at \$1.40-\$1.42, while a rally through \$1.55 would see the stage for a challenge of long term resistance at \$1.60.

The DM cross-rate has been trading around the 2.54 area in recent days on relatively weak short term momentum. However, medium term oscillators remain constructive, suggesting that recent weakness in the cross rate will be short lived. An eventual test of the 2.59 area still seems indicated. Nearby support exists at 2.51 and 2.485.

Peanuts



Andy Capp



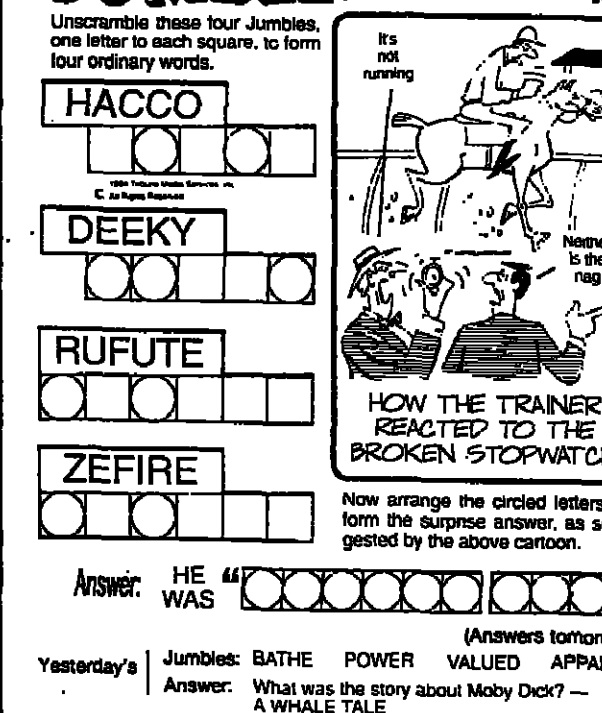
Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Harris



JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME



THE Daily Crossword by Eugene Pottenberger



Yeltsin elected to head CIS; no deal on economic union

ASHGABAT (AFP) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin was elected Friday to head the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at a summit here marking the alliance's second anniversary, but the CIS leaders failed to iron out details of an economic union.

CIS leaders unanimously voted in favour of the Russian leader who will serve out the first term of a six-month rotating presidency of the Commonwealth.

Turkmenistan President Saparmurad Niyazov announced the newly-created rotating chairmanship was described by the Turkmen leader as a mechanism to distribute and bolster responsibility for the alliance among its 12 members.

"This procedure will allow us to make the work of the CIS executive bodies more effective and it will facilitate organizational and other matters in between meetings of CIS heads of states," Mr. Niyazov said.

The decision was viewed as confirming Russia's dominant role in the CIS which Yeltsin founded along with Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk and Belarusian leader Stanislav Shushkevich at a meeting near Minsk in 1991.

The leaders adopted a declaration on "cooperation and confidence-building" among member-states modelled after statements from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

The 12 leaders proclaimed their respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country and to reject the use of force or the threat of force and of economic sanctions in relations.

They called for resorting to peaceful means in resolving conflicts and voiced "a shared concern for the broadening of armed conflicts fuelled by expansionism, nationalism and religious intolerance."

Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliyev, whose country has been waging a six-year undeclared war with Armenia over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, urged leaders to force Armenia to end its "aggression" against his republic.

Mr. Aliyev said heads of state should "demand that Armenia cease its military actions" and called for a CIS commission to be set up to investigate the "criminal actions" perpetrated by the Armenians.

Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian shot back that the war between Azeri forces and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh had dragged on "because of the unwillingness of the Azeri leadership to settle the conflict by political means."

The war of words between Mr. Ter-Petrosian and Mr. Aliyev came as Azeri forces launched a large-scale attack on the enclave early Friday, according to Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh in a report from the Interfax News Agency.

The Azeri land forces were supported by about 10 armoured vehicles in assaults on Martakert, in the north, Martuni, in the southwest, and Gadout, in the south, the Interfax News Agency reported, citing the press service at Stepanakert, the enclave's capital.

The offensive, launched at dawn, was still under way in mid-afternoon, the enclave's foreign affairs spokesman Arkadi Goukassian said.

He described the offensive as an attempt by Baku "to force out by arms all the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh." Thousands of people have been killed in six years of fighting over the status of the enclave, which is seeking to remove itself from the Azerbaijani authority under which it was placed by Stalin.

Successive attempts by Soviet or Russian authorities and by international mediators to resolve the conflict have failed.

The fighting erupted again in mid-December after several weeks of calm following a series of victories by Armenian forces that saw them break through deep into Azerbaijani territory.

The presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia met Friday in the sidelines of the CIS summit without any sign of rapprochement.

In separate statements after the meeting, Mr. Aliyev called on CIS member states to demand the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijan territory, and urged the creation of a special commission to determine the "material damage" caused to Baku, and to "condemn the criminal actions by the occupiers."

He said more than 18,000 people had been killed, with 50,000 wounded and 4,000 taken prisoner, since the start of the conflict.

Mr. Ter-Petrosian said the fighting was continuing because Baku was not willing to settle the conflict by political means and was acting in defiance of United Nations resolutions.

All heads of states of the 12 former Soviet republics were present except for Belarusian leader Shushkevich who sent a representative.

CIS heads of state were unable to make progress in setting up an economic union in line with a treaty signed at the last summit meeting held in September and a proposal from Russia to establish a minority rights convention never materialised.

In another development, Turkmenistan, the host city of the talks, decided to join the economic union as an associate member of the treaty.

Leaders failed to agree on coordination of pricing, tax and customs policies, a key aspect of the economic union treaty aimed at establishing a common market among members.

The item was knocked off the agenda of talks as was the proposed minority rights charter that Russia was pushing in a bid to guarantee the rights of the 25 million ethnic Russians living outside its borders.

A Russian Foreign Ministry official said Thursday that Ukraine and Uzbekistan were opposed to the convention and argued that provisions on prohibiting assimilation of minorities were in violation of national legislation.

The summit however paved the way to several one-on-one meetings between leaders, including key talks between Mr. Yeltsin and Mr. Kravchuk on disarmament while Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze held separate meetings with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Uzbek President Islam Karimov and with Mr. Kravchuk.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Charlton tops Irish popularity poll

DUBLIN (R) — Englishman Jack Charlton, who steered the Irish Republic's soccer team to the 1994 World Cup finals, was picked Friday as the most popular man in Ireland. The blunt-spoken football manager, revered in sports-mad Ireland, was chosen by 38 per cent of those polled by the Irish Press Group. Beaten into second place was moderate Irish nationalist John Hume, who has been a prime architect this year of moves to bring peace to Northern Ireland after 25 years of guerrilla conflict. Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, leader of the political wing of the Irish Republican Army fighting to oust Britain from Northern Ireland, won just one per cent of support in the poll.

Brundie eyes Indycar circuit

LONDON (AFP) — British driver Martin Brundie may try his luck on the Indycar series next year after failing to obtain a leading Formula 1 contract. Having finished seventh in the World Championship this year with French Ligier outfit, he is annoyed at not being signed up by one of the top teams and believes the Indycar circuit is becoming more attractive. "The teams have to find less money to be competitive and the cars are much more equal," he said.

Advocaat to coach in finals

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Dick Advocaat, who took the Dutch through the qualifying rounds, will coach the team in the 1994 World Cup finals in the United States. Dutch soccer officials said. Advocaat accepted the Dutch Football Association's offer, made collapsed, the association said. Advocaat led the Dutch past England to second place in their qualifying group behind Norway. He had already signed a four-year contract to manage the national side until the 1998 World Cup finals in France. Cruyff was to take over for the 1994 finals, but had reportedly asked for too much money. His insistence on wearing and marketing his own brand of sportswear during the tournament was also an obstacle.

Robson: United still have work to do

LONDON (R) — Manchester United may be racing towards a second English premier championship and the record books but their former England captain Bryan Robson believes there is still a lot of work to do. "To compare ourselves with the great Liverpool teams of the past or Sir Matt Busby's side in the 1960s, we have to prove ourselves over a four or five-year period," Robson said. "The first step is to make sure we become the first United side to retain a championship since Sir Matt Busby's Babes in the 1950s." United could go 15 points clear if they beat third-placed Blackburn at Old Trafford Sunday at the start of a busy holiday programme. "After an away match at Oldham on Dec. 29, United return home to face second-placed Leeds on New Year's Day and then go to Anfield to play Liverpool three days later. If they come through that, and their rivals slip up at all, United will be well on schedule to record the quickest title of modern times. That honour belongs to Liverpool who settled the 1983 championship on April 12, with six games still to play. Robson, who turns 37 in the new year, is in his 13th season with United and has found it difficult to maintain a place in a side acclaimed as the best for years.

Cardiff faces more punishment

CARDIFF, Wales (AP) — Cardiff City's soccer team is likely to face disciplinary action after a pitch invasion and other fan disturbances at Wednesday's night game against Welsh rival Swansea. The game was delayed by some 40 minutes as fans from both teams ran onto the field at Ninian Park. Mounted police and officers with dogs took several minutes to clear the playing area. During the second half, after Cardiff's Gary Thompson scored the game's only goal, seats ripped from their mountings and other objects were hurled from a section of the grandstand reserved for Swansea supporters. Several spectators were injured. "We will

have to examine all the evidence and see exactly what the circumstances were before we can decide what action, if any, to take," Football Association of Wales chief executive Alun Evans said Thursday. Cardiff has already been fined £25,000 (\$75,000) for fan incidents at two games earlier this season. The Cardiff chairman, Rick Wright, said surveillance cameras would be able to identify fans who were involved in the trouble and those guilty would be banned from the stadium.

Bangladeshi is fastest man in South Asia

DHAKA (R) — Bangladesh's Bimal Chandra Tarafdar became South Asia's fastest man Friday when he won the 100-metre sprint in record time on the fifth day of the week-long South Asian Federation Games. He clocked 10.61 seconds against the previous record of 10.68. Sri Lankan K.V. Damayanthi Darsha snapped up the fastest woman title when she won the 100-metre sprint in 11.78 seconds. In the marathon, Sri Lankan K.A. Karunaratne took the gold with a time of two hours 21.38 minutes followed by compatriot K.L. Samarasinghe with two hours 21.58. India's Bhawarika Deka and Roopa Unnikrishnan won the shooting golds in the men's and women's individual events. Sri Lanka clinched the gold for the shooting team event. Sri Lankans Lihini Weerasuriya and Saranga Sangakara won the women's doubles tennis gold, beating Indians I. Rashmi and J. Parekh 6-0 6-3.

Dutchman vows to stop swearing

SWINDON, England (AFP) — Swindon town's Dutch midfielder Luc Nijholt has promised to cut out the foul language that cost him a two-match suspension and a club fine. Nijholt, 32, expressed bitter regret over an outburst for which he was sent off in the home premiership match against Queens Park Rangers on Nov. 24. He said: "It was a bit stupid and I certainly regretted it — especially when we went to Liverpool. To play at Anfield was a great occasion for the other lads — I had to miss it. 'It was enough for me to make up my mind I would never swear at a referee again.'"

Lewis camp slam IBF decision

LONDON (AFP) — Lennox Lewis' camp are furious that a world heavyweight title unification bout between the Briton and American Evander Holyfield will not be sanctioned by the International Boxing Federation (IBF). Holyfield regained the IBF and World Boxing Association crowns by beating compatriot Riddick Bowe last month, and Lewis is the World Boxing Council champion. But IBF President Bob Lee stressed that American Michael Moorer had been first in line to fight Bowe and was now the scheduled opponent for Holyfield should he decide to continue boxing. "I thought the whole world wanted an undisputed champion," said Frank Maloney, Lewis' manager. "We're flabbergasted by Lee's statement. 'One man is denying Lennox the chance to fight for the undisputed championship of the world and denying fans the bout they really want to see. Everyone had agreed to it in principle and we are looking at an April date.'"

Navratilova set for grand finale

TOKYO (AFP) — Martina Navratilova's final season will start in Tokyo when she goes onto the court to defend her singles and doubles titles at the \$750,000 Toray Pan Pacific Open Women's Tournament on Feb. 1-6. She will skip the Grand Slam Australian Open in January. But her way to another new record of 167th singles victory will be a tough challenge, as the Tokyo field includes current world number one Steffi Graf of Germany, three-time champion Gabriela Sabatini of Argentina and Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic. Another entrant sure to attract attention will be a player at the start of her career — the impressive Iva Majoli of Croatia. The winner on the artificial indoor at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium will receive \$150,000 and the runner-up \$67,500.

Anand gamble stops Believsky's run at PCA chess qualifier

GRONINGEN, Netherlands (AP) — Top-seeded Indian Viswanathan Anand claimed a share of first place at the PCA qualifier chess tournament by breaking Ukrainian Alexander Beliavsky's 14-game undefeated streak against grandmasters.

Anand has struggled to find his form here, and he took a big chance by playing the short attack with white, pioneered by British grandmaster Nigel Short. Beliavsky responded with the Sicilian Najdorf, world champion Garry Kasparov's favourite defence. Beliavsky and Georgian grandmaster Zurab Azmaiparashvili were Kasparov's seconds when he defeated Short in the first Professional Chess Association world championship in London earlier this

year. Anand was convinced he had walked into a trap during the game.

"Beliavsky was smiling all the game. He never smiles. During the game Azmaiparashvili would walk past and they would both smile at each other," Anand said. "I thought I'd walked straight into Kasparov's preparation." The Indian grandmaster said he then started to play for a draw and was amazed when "inaccurate play by black" gave him a chance to win. "I'm just relieved to stop Big Al," he said, using Beliavsky's nickname.

Anand said he would avoid the short attack in the future, but it did help him become the first player to beat Beliavsky in

the Ukrainian's last 14 games against grandmasters, including four in this tournament.

Anand and Beliavsky now share the top spot in the tournament with American Joel Benjamin and Russian Sergei Tiviakov, all with four points out of five games.

Benjamin, playing black, scored an impressive victory over Russian Evgeny Bareev, who used his queen to counter Benjamin's Nimzo Indian defence.

The Russian took the initiative, but Benjamin's scrupulously accurate play neutralised his attack.

Benjamin is now due to play with the advantage of white pieces Friday, against either Beliavsky or Anand. Tiviakov crushed Michael

Adams' Sicilian Taimanov opening after the British grandmaster created a weakness in the heart of his own defence and then blundered the game away.

The top seven grandmasters here and Short will compete in elimination matches next year to decide who will challenge Kasparov for the PCA title in 1995.

The PCA, which Kasparov and Short founded in February after quitting the rival chess ruling body FIDE, has succeeded in attracting 54 top grandmasters to this \$230,000 event.

Eleven rounds of chess will be played according to the Swiss system, with players meeting different opponents each day. The last round is scheduled for Dec. 30.

Becker: players have used drugs

BONN (Agencies) — Tennis players have tested positive for cocaine, amphetamines and marijuana, but the sport's governing body has kept results secret, Boris Becker has said.

Asked in a newspaper interview if he believed players had been tested positive for drugs but not punished, Becker said: "Yes, I don't mean that it has necessarily been cocaine, speed or marijuana."

"The question is whether the ATP can even allow a doping test to have a positive result because then the whole sport gets a bad reputation and the sponsors will really go away," Becker said in the interview published Friday in the daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

Fashanu escapes misconduct charge

LONDON (AFP) — Wimbledon striker John Fashanu was cleared by an English Football Association (FA) inquiry into an incident which left Tottenham captain Gary Mabbutt with multiple fractures of his cheekbone and eye socket, it was revealed Friday.

But the decision immediately sparked calls for more action to be taken to stop dangerous injuries caused by reckless play.

Mabbutt was struck by Fashanu's elbow as the pair contested a header in a premiership match on Nov. 24.

The Spurs skipper suffered four fractures of the cheekbone and three fractures of the eye socket. The blow to the eye socket was so severe it had to be rebuilt with the help of a metal plate.

A three-man commission of inquiry spent four-and-a-half hours watching video evidence Thursday. On Friday FA spokesman David Bloomfield issued a statement which

cleared Fashanu. He said: "After considering the evidence presented to the commission of inquiry by representatives of Tottenham, Wimbledon and the three match officials, the members of the commission are not satisfied that they can justifiably recommend a charge of misconduct preferred against John Fashanu."

The Wimbledon striker, dubbed "Flash the bash" because of his uncompromising approach to the game, sat alongside Mabbutt before the inquiry.

Fashanu emerged tight-lipped after the inquiry and refused to comment.

Mabbutt, wearing dark glasses to hide the damage to his right eye and face was more forthcoming, saying: "It was a business-like and fair hearing."

Surgeons told him he had come within a millimetre of losing the sight in his right eye. Afterwards English foot-

ball's Players' Union chief Gordon Taylor called for the creation of an independent disciplinary tribunal.

Taylor said he was appalled but not surprised at the lack of action taken by the game's ruling body after a series of disfiguring injuries caused by flying elbows.

He said: "The game can't ignore the dangerous injuries suffered by Gary, John Uzzell and Peter Beardsley as a result of reckless challenges with the elbow."

"We can't keep brushing this under the carpet. One of these days it will be too late, when someone has lost an eye or suffered brain damage."

"To ask a referee to reconsider after he has initially decided to take no action places him in an invidious position."

"There should be an independent system, a panel of experts from the different bodies — players, referees and managers, along with representatives from the FA Disciplinary Organisation — to give a more objective view."

"No-one is saying John Fashanu wanted to injure Gary Mabbutt. He's a big, strong lad who uses his height and strength to best advantage and it would be naive not to expect him to get into scrapes."

"But if players are jumping with elbows coming in from the side, it's going to cause problems and you can't wrap it up any other way."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSH
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ANSWERS TO WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q.1—Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
♠Q6 ♠A ♠J1065 ♠KQ984
The bidding has proceeded:
South West North East
1♣ Pass 1♠ Pass
2♠ Pass 2♠ Pass

What do you bid now?
A.—Partner has shown a six-card spade suit and a hand of limited value. With your prime cards, ruffing value and filling honor in North's suit, raise to four spades. Three spades is for the weak-kneed.

Q.2—Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
♠K643 ♠A72 ♠6532 ♠65
Partner opens the bidding with two no trump, showing 21-22 points. What action do you take?

A.—If you elected to pass, this department won't quibble. Nonetheless, the odds favor bidding close games when vulnerable, as we would choose to act. Our choice would be a Stayman bid of three clubs en route to three no trump to check on the possibility of a 4-4 spade fit.

Q.3—As South, vulnerable, you hold:
♠A36 ♠K9852 ♠5 ♠7865
The bidding has proceeded:
North East South West
1♣ Pass 1♥ Pass
2♥ Pass ?

What action do you take?
A.—While the prospects of playing two diamonds are not enthralling, any action could carry you from the pot into the frying pan. Partner almost surely has a six-card suit on this auction and to rebid a weakish five-card suit courts disaster. We trust bidding no trump didn't even cross your mind. Pass.

Q.4—As South, vulnerable, you hold:
♠A105 ♠AQJ5 ♠8 ♠KQ72
The bidding has proceeded:
South West North East
1♣ Pass 1♠ Pass
1♥ Pass ?

What do you bid now?
A.—If you play splinter bids, this is the hand for a jump to four diamonds, showing game-going values and shortness in the bid suit. If not, jump to four spades—your hand re-values to 20 points in support of spades, so you want to be in game no matter how sketchy partner's response.

Q.5—Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
♠7 ♠AQK109 ♠AQJ ♠J1095
The bidding has proceeded:
South West North East
1♥ Pass 1NT Pass

What do you bid now?
A.—It is tempting to make an invitational jump to three hearts, but avoid that temptation when you only have a five-card suit, even one as good as this. Our choice would be two clubs. If partner cannot bid a second time, we don't think game is in the cards.

Q.6—As South, vulnerable, you hold:
♠732 ♠AQK105 ♠KQ6 ♠6
Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with one no trump (16-18 points). What action do you take?

A.—We're certainly going to bid: it's just a question of how high. We think four hearts is overly aggressive (after all, we need two plus tricks from partner), but two hearts is much too conservative. That makes three hearts the pundits' choice.

Macari hunts premier lead

GLASGOW, Scotland (AFP) — Glasgow Celtic's new manager Lou Macari is chasing two Christmas victories which he believes will put the side on top of Scotland's premier division for the first time in 16 months.

Celtic are a point behind co-leaders Motherwell, Glasgow Rangers and Aberdeen, and play the first two sides within the next eight days.

Motherwell, Celtic's opponents Monday, have produced the biggest shock this season, at the corresponding time last year they were 13 points behind leaders, and eventual champions, Rangers.

Macari, mindful of Celtic's poor performances in recent seasons, said: "We have not been in contention at this stage

in recent years so this is the most important period for quite some time. Most people expected Rangers to be well ahead but we are within striking distance."

To be honest, I expected it to be nip and tuck after we won at Rangers last time. I thought there was nothing between the teams and couldn't see a gap forming between us."

Winger Paul Byrne should be fit for Celtic despite a recurrence of a knee complaint while Motherwell striker Dougie Arnott is ready to resume after a three week absence.

Motherwell have emerged from the relegation worries of 12 months ago to be one of the title contenders

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مكتبة من الكتب

PLO wants to use several currencies in occupied lands

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) wants to use a mixture of Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian currencies as well as the American dollar in the autonomous territories envisaged under the Sept. 13 agreement with Israel, Palestinian sources said.

The sources said the PLO position was conveyed to Israel during talks on economic cooperation in Paris over the past two months, adding that the Israeli team had not formally responded to the request yet.

But indications are that Israel would agree to the PLO request after "certain modifications," said a senior PLO source. The source declined to elaborate.

According to the sources, the PLO's move to have the Israeli shekel and Egyptian pound along with the Jordanian and American dollar stemmed from a desire to "keep all options open" during the "final status negotiations" scheduled to begin in the third year of autonomy under the Sept. 13 accord.

"Given the inevitability that large numbers of Palestinians will have to continue to work in Israel and will get paid in Israeli shekels, it is only logical that the Israeli currency will have to remain valid in the occupied territories until such time the Palestinian economy is totally independent of Israel," said the senior PLO source.

The sources said the PLO wanted to "progressively expand" the use of the mixture of currencies to the rest of the West Bank during the interim accord.

In the same vein, the source said, the Gaza Strip will have close links with Egypt if only because of the close proximity of the Mediterranean strip with Egyptian territory and the fact that Egypt ruled Gaza until the 1967 war had led to many de facto situations where such relations cannot be shed overnight.

"The move (for a mixture of currencies) has little to do with the PLO's quest for an integrated economic relationship with Jordan, and the use of non-Jordanian currencies along with the dinar in the occupied territories will have

no political bearing," according to the source.

"The PLO remains committed to the ultimate objective of very close economic relations with Jordan," said the source when asked why PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat had not yet endorsed a draft economic accord with Jordan. "The idea is to keep all Palestinian options open and preempt any moves that might be used by Israel to deny Palestinian statehood."

No Jordanian official was immediately available for comment. But officials have said that Jordan would have to exercise its own options to maintain the stability of the dinar if the PLO did not ratify the draft economic accord.

Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) Governor Mohammad Saeed Nabulsi said last week that a Jordanian decision to enter an agreement with Israel to reopen Jordanian commercial banks in the occupied territories was independent of the proposed economic accord with the PLO.

Jordan had started negotiating the agreement with Israel, which was signed early this month, many months before the PLO and Israel signed their Sept. 13 autonomy accord.

Officials say that the banking accord was an essential element to allow Jordan to have a say in the monetary and banking affairs of the occupied territories by virtue of the fact that between JD 300 million and JD 400 million are now in circulation among the two million Palestinians living there.

Officials say Jordan has informed the PLO that any decision it takes in the context of currency and other monetary affairs of the occupied territories should be closely coordinated with the Kingdom if only to enable Amman to adopt the necessary measures to protect its currency.

"The quest for Israeli permission to set up an independent Palestinian authority has been temporarily set back," said the senior PLO source, confirming that Israel had turned down the request saying a Palestinian central bank or even a monetary authority was a token of Palestinian independence and sovereignty, which the Jewish state argues is beyond the realm of the Sept. 13 accord.

"But they have promised to

look into the PLO's request to use the mixture of currencies in the interim period," said the source.

An option being entertained by the PLO is a "Palestinian national bank" without the term "central" or "monetary" authority. This proposal received British government backing during the London visit in mid-December of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, other sources told the Jordan Times.

According to the sources, although the PLO wants Israeli permission to print and issue Palestinian currency the organisation does not believe that it could release any independent currency if only because of the lack of monetary cover required under international standards.

"In the negotiations with Israel, we have demanded the right to determine our own monetary policies and the right to issue a Palestinian currency," an unidentified member of the Palestinian delegation was quoted as saying by the Jerusalem Post.

"According to the delegate, this does not mean that the Palestinians would start to print Palestinian money," the Post said. "He said they demanded the right to do so once they see they can back the currency with reserves."

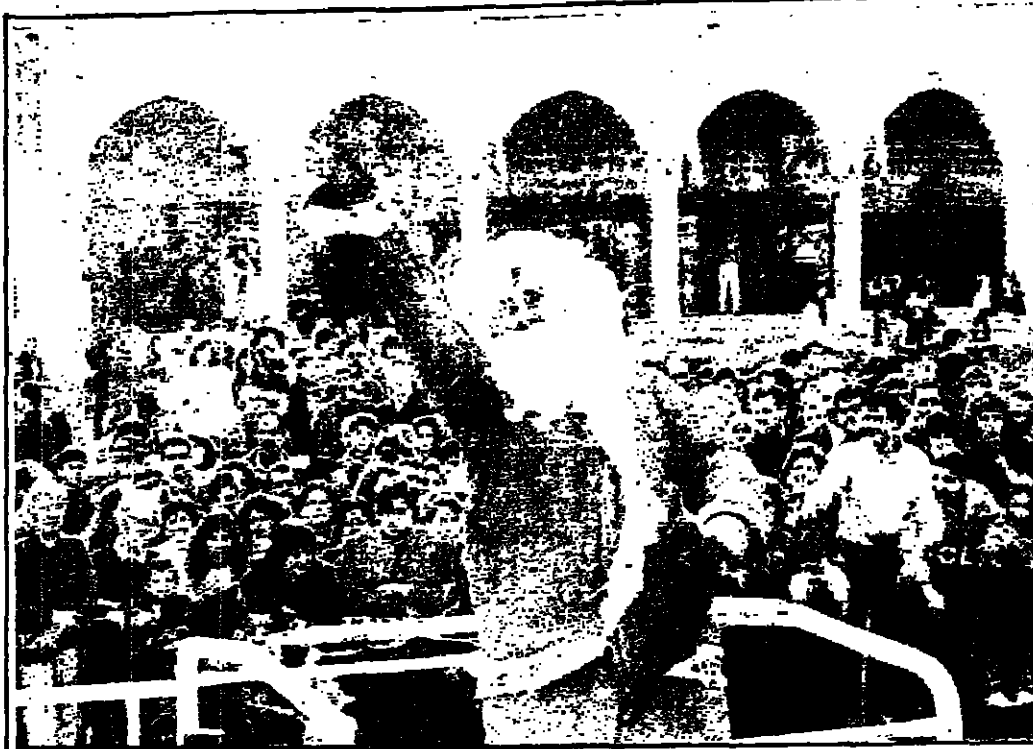
According to the delegate, the Israeli negotiators did not reject or accept the demand.

"They told us that it is a political issue, a matter of sovereignty, and therefore needs to be referred to the Israeli government for approval," the delegate was quoted as saying by the Post.

"We argued against this point, assuring the Israelis that a currency is not a sign of independence," the delegate told the Post. "...Other entities — like Scotland — have their own currencies without being independent states."

According to independent Palestinian sources, Mr. Arafat wants "as many tokens of eventual Palestinian independence as possible" to go along with the belated beginning of Palestinian autonomy.

"He wants to reassure the Palestinians in the occupied territories that self-rule is not an end in itself, but the beginning of Palestinian independence," said a source closely familiar with the thinking of the PLO chairman.



SANTA IN GAZA: A Gazan Santa Claus posted on a cart, waves to children while holding a Palestinian flag before distributing sweets for Christmas at Deir Al Latineh school in Gaza City.

It is the first Christmas celebrated in Gaza by the Palestinian Christians since the beginning of the intifada in 1987 (AFP photo)

Hurd due here in January for talks on peace, bilateral ties

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd is expected here on a short visit in the first week of January as part of his country's follow up efforts on the Arab-Israeli peace process, officials and diplomatic sources said Friday.

They said Mr. Hurd's visit would be part of a Middle East tour which was scheduled to begin in Israel on Jan. 3. The secretary will meet with Israeli leaders as well as Palestinian leaders from the occupied territories.

His Majesty King Hussein held talks with Mr. Hurd last week shortly before he ended a private visit to the United Kingdom. The talks focused on the Arab-Israeli peace process and Jordanian-British relations, reports said.

During Mr. Hurd's visit here, the King, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan and Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali are expected to hold talks with the British minister.

Officials said the talks would cover details of British involvement in the peace process as well as London's contribution to the bilateral level as well as a member of the European Community (EC) to ensuring the success of the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

"Mr. Hurd would like to have a firsthand information on the status of implementing the Israel-PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) declaration of principles signed on Sept. 13 and ascertain whether Britain could contribute to accelerating the process," said a senior source.

Mr. Hurd told reporters Tuesday: "The peace process has to be made by the people on the spot, but from time to



Douglas Hurd

time it is useful to listen and to be able to put in a good word."

Mr. Hurd's visit to the region comes close to the heels of the first official visit PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat paid to Britain.

The British position in the context of the peace process during the talks Prime Minister John Major and others held with Mr. Arafat was, according to the sources, that while London would like to see the negotiations on implementation of Palestinian self-rule get out of the deadlock it does not feel that outsiders could do anything to force an agreement.

At the same time, the British government stands ready to extend help to help facilitate the success of the Israel-PLO accord in terms of aiding Palestinian development projects and encouraging the British private sector to invest in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, they said.

Mr. Hurd said Tuesday that Britain was willing to respond positively if called upon to contribute to an international force to interact with the Palestinians and Israelis in im-

plementing Palestinian self-rule.

"I did not exclude it, but it is not yet an actual proposition," Mr. Hurd told reporters Tuesday, expanding on earlier comments he made in the House of Commons. "I have not heard either from Chairman Arafat or the Israelis a practical proposition."

Britain is not expected to announce any dramatic increase of its direct financial aid to the occupied territories or the United Nations Relief and Works Agencies (UNRWA). The British government is contributing 16 per cent of an emergency EC aid of \$24 million to the Palestinian economy during 1994.

Britain also shares a strengthening views on the part of donors, who have pledged up to \$2.4 billion in assistance to the Palestinians in the next two years, that credible Palestinian institutions be set up before aid is actually channelled.

"It is very important that there should be assurances on all sides that this money is properly spent," Mr. Hurd said.

"It is important that there should be on the Palestinian side the structures to make use of that."

Reports had said that Mr. Arafat was expected to raise with British leaders the issue of up to \$1.5 billion in gold that was used as a cover for Palestinian pounds issued in the 40s when Palestine was under British mandate.

According to the reports, the gold was not accounted for when Britain left Palestine in 1948.

However, there was no report whether the PLO chairman raised the issue with Mr. Major or other British leaders during his visit to London in mid-December.

CIS summit considers 'Zhirinovsky factor'

ASHGABAT (AFP) — CIS leaders discussed Friday the strong gains made by ultranationalists in Russia's elections to parliament, with some raising in private meetings the possibility of joint action to counter a possible threat from Russia, officials said.

Heads of state wrapped up a summit meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) one hour earlier and opted instead for one-on-one meetings that would allow leaders to better sound each other out on what was termed here as the "Zhirinovsky factor," the threat posed by radical nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky.

Vadim Kuznetsov, an aide to Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, said that CIS leaders failed to agree on key issues at the summit out of concern that agreements with Russia could bind them in the future to a new hardline regime.

"The Zhirinovsky factor was in the air throughout the summit, which is why republics became more pragmatic and driven by their own interests," said Mr. Kuznetsov.

Officials accompanying Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze raised the issue of mounting Russian nationalism in separate talks with Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliyev, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov.

The officials, who spoke on condition they not be named, said that the five leaders had agreed to press Russian President Boris Yeltsin during a private meeting on whether Mr. Zhirinovsky's strongly nationalist ideas were shared by the government.

Mr. Zhirinovsky vowed during his campaign to build a "greater Russia" that would include former Soviet republics but he has since toned down his plans, calling instead for economic sanctions against neighbouring states that are considered to be discriminating against their Russian minorities.

Mr. Karimov, in talks with Mr. Shevardnadze, expressed the view that leaders should begin laying the groundwork for joint action if Mr. Zhirinovsky's election in parliament forced the Russian leadership to opt for a more aggressive policy towards its neighbours, a Georgian official said.

Mr. Nazarbayev, in talks with Mr. Kravchuk and Mr. Shevardnadze, raised concerns that Russia "wanted to annex territories of the republic where the majority of Russians live, according to a member of the Kazakh delegation.

Leaders reportedly agreed that the new constitution gave

COLUMN

Powerball winners come forward

WASHINGTON (AP) — A retired bricklayer with 17 children and 29 grandchildren said he plans to buy a country home for his wife with some of his \$45 million in lottery winnings. And the other \$45 million winner said he plans to move "to a place with a lot of palm trees and a lot of umbrellas." Percy Ray Pridden, 69, could speak only a short time before burying his head in his hands and crying. After disclosing his plan to buy a house, he said "Somebody's going to have to tell me" how to spend the next 20 years. The Powerball Game is the closest thing the United States has to a national lottery. It is played in 14 states and the nation's capital. Sixteen previous drawings over the past eight weeks had not yielded a winning ticket. Pridden, a Washington resident who formerly worked for a construction company, said he wasn't certain of his good luck until Thursday evening though the drawing was Wednesday night. He had a friend help him identify his ticket and make sure he had actually won. "I couldn't trust nobody but him.... I was trembling so fast," he said, a man who identified himself as C. Gill of Richmond, VA, also is the sole owner of a \$45 million ticket. He showed up at lottery headquarters later in the day with his wife and 4-year-old daughter, saying "it's going to be an early Christmas." Gill, 35, resisted being pinned down on just what he does for a living. But he said he hoped to move to a warmer climate: "sooner or later." He added, "I'm going to try to give something back to my neighbourhood." Tong Kim, who owns the liquor store where Pridden bought his ticket, said he was eager to meet the winner. Kim, as well as Roland Shaw, who owns the liquor store where the other winning ticket was purchased, will receive \$25,000 each. Shaw called his winnings "a beautiful bonus — Christmas present."

Thieves steal charity's Christmas food

FLRMING, France (AFP) — Thieves broke into a warehouse here and stole stocks of food which the charity organisation Restaurants Du Coeur (Restaurants Of The Heart) planned to distribute to poor people at Christmas. Aid workers said the theft occurred Wednesday night.

Foreigners visit Santa in Finland's far north

ROVANIEMI, Finland (AP) — The Finns are doing a pretty good job of convincing some people that Santa Claus really lives in Lapland. More than 10,000 foreigners are trekking to this Arctic Circle town this holiday season to visit a Santa Claus village, travel executives said Thursday. That's nearly 18 per cent more than the 8,500 who made the trip last year. Fifty special flights were scheduled to bring in foreign tourists, who mainly come from Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, France, the United States and Japan. "More and more people are beginning to realise that Santa's home is in northern Finland," said Vjko-Pekka Kurki, managing director of Lapland Travel, which promotes Santa in drumming up tourism for Finland's far north. Visitors can sit on Santa's knee, shop in Santa's workshops and ride over frozen lakes in sleighs drawn by reindeer. The foreigners are expected to spend more than \$7 million this year, Mr. Kurki said. A typical British tour charges the equivalent of \$950 for a two-night visit, which includes lodging, meals, the Santa visit, skiing and reindeer rides. The marketing of Santa is a year-round occupation in Rovaniemi, which competes with similar projects in Norway, Sweden and Greenland. Of course, many people can't make it to see Santa in a town only 1,400 miles from the North Pole. They write. "There are letters from more than 100 countries and we expected the total will exceed 400,000," said Tuja Tonttu, a helper at Santa's Rovaniemi Post Office.

NEWS IN BRIEF

India's finance minister resigns

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's finance minister and architect of its free-market reforms has submitted his resignation, under criticism for failing to check a massive stock scandal, a news agency reported Friday. It was not immediately clear if the government was accepting the resignation. Government spokesman S. Narendra said the report by United News of India was inaccurate, but he gave no further details. An official in the Finance Ministry also said the report was untrue. Manmohan Singh was faulted by a parliamentary committee for failing to supervise the stock exchange while banks were illegally siphoning more than \$1 billion into the market for speculation. Mr. Singh handed his resignation to Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao on Tuesday after the committee's report was released, said United News.

Hanoi welcomes easing of U.S. sanctions

HANOI (AFP) — Vietnam welcomed Friday as a "positive measure" Washington's decision to ease its economic sanctions against Hanoi. The decision to ease the embargo — imposed at the end of the Vietnam war in 1975 — is good for American companies and for Vietnam, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. Under the new eased restrictions U.S. firms will be allowed to take part in development projects in Vietnam if they are approved by international financial bodies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. The U.S. decision was announced in Washington on Thursday.

Ghali backs larger German U.N. role

BONN (R) — U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali called Friday for Germany to play a larger role with the United Nations — including peace-keeping duties. In an article for the East German Leipzig Volkszeitung newspaper, Dr. Ghali said Bonn had to assume a "strong and engaged new role in the U.N. in order to counter political isolation; active participation in the work and all the responsibilities of the U.N. is necessary. That is why Germany must participate in expanding the perspectives of the U.N., especially in peace-making, environmental protection, defending human rights and in many other global problem areas."

Bangladeshis rally against Islamic sect

DHAKA (R) — Nearly 15,000 members of Islam's largest Sunni sect rallied in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka on Friday in an attempt to force the government to declare the smaller Qadiani sect non-Muslim, police and witnesses said. Organisers said the Qadianis had already been declared non-Muslims in many Islamic countries. The rally, organised by the international Majlis-e-Tabafuz-e-Khatmun Nabuwat, also demanded an immediate ban on all publications by the Qadianis and the sacking of all members of the sect from government jobs.

3 Saudis beheaded for armed robbery

RIYADH (AFP) — Three Saudis convicted of armed robbery were beheaded Friday in the eastern city of Dammam, the Interior Ministry said. It said Mohammad Sibati, Hani Ramih and Abdul Ghani Abdul Aziz had stolen cash and jewellery from banks in Dammam and nearby Al Khubar. One person was shot and wounded in the Dammam hold-up. The latest executions bring to 85 the number of people beheaded in the kingdom so far this year, mainly for drug trafficking.

Libya denies knowledge of vanished dissident

CAIRO (Agencies) — The Libyan government, making its first public comment on the disappearance of a Libyan opposition leader in Cairo two weeks ago, has said it knows nothing about the case.

The official Libyan news agency JANA said Foreign Minister Omar Montasser told a news conference in Tripoli on Thursday: "We have no knowledge about the disappearance of the man called Kikha."

Mansour Kikha, a former foreign minister in exile since 1981 who heads a Libyan opposition alliance, vanished a day before Libya publicly vowed to crush exiled opponents of revolutionary leader Muammar Qadhafi.

JANA quoted Mr. Montasser as saying that investigations would clear up Mr. Kikha's fate and "we have great confidence in the Egyptian security agencies, since it is said that he disappeared in Egypt."

The disappearance has seriously embarrassed the Egyptian government. President Hosni Mubarak's senior foreign policy adviser, Osama Al Baz, paid a sudden visit to Libya this week for talks which diplomats believed must have covered the case.

A senior Egyptian government official said on Friday that Egypt would take a position on the Kikha case when security agencies had completed their investigation.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said the Egyptian position would take into account "the fact that Egypt and its people do not tolerate anyone trying to harm the security of Egypt and the sanctity of its guests."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa described the disappearance as an "abduction." Mr. Musa immediately toned down the comment, noting that Egyptian investigators had not determined whether Mr. Kikha was kidnapped.

Kuwait's Bush plot verdicts due today

KUWAIT (R) — A Kuwaiti court Saturday is due to deliver judgment of 11 Iraqis and three Kuwaitis accused of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate former U.S. President George Bush.

The state security court prosecutor has demanded the death penalty for 11-Iraqis and one Kuwaiti charged with planning to blow up Mr. Bush during his April 14-16 visit to Kuwait.

The prosecutor has also demanded 10-year jail terms for two Kuwaitis accused of complicity in the plot.

The verdicts are expected at around 0700 GMT to 0800 GMT, lawyers say. Police have told the four-month-old trial that the group was found in possession of a Toyota van packed with 80 kilograms of sophisticated explosives. They had arrived in Kuwait from Iraq in the van and another vehicle carrying 13 cases of illicit whisky, two pistols, a rifle and a bag of explosives.

The United States launched a cruise missile attack on Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad on June 27 after saying it had found compelling evidence Iraq was involved in the plot.

At least six people were killed when a number of missiles went astray.

Mr. Bush's visit, to commemorate his leadership in the 1991 Gulf war that ended Iraq's seven-month occupation, went off without incident.

Iraqi defendant Wali Al Ghazali, 36, has admitted being instructed by Iraqi intelligence to blow up Mr. Bush.

Iraqi co-defendant Raad Al Assadi, 33, has admitted being told by Iraqi intelligence to help Ghazali set bombs in shops and car showrooms but has denied knowledge of any plot to assassinate Mr. Bush.

The other defendants say they came to Kuwait to see friends and family, seek loans or collect money owed or to help smuggle or sell alcohol.

On Nov. 1 Al Thawra, the newspaper of Iraq's ruling Baath Party, warned Kuwait's leaders they "shall pay the price of their crimes" for detaining the 11 Iraqis.

Iraq says Kuwait and the United States conspired the plot to try to tighten economic sanctions against Baghdad.

In an apparent reference to Mr. Bush, Judge Salah Al Fahad told reporters at a session in October: "The personality of the (intended) victim does not affect the course of the case."

"We are trying to determine the positions of the accused and our only concern is that no innocent should be done injustice. We look for evidence of innocence before evidence of accusation."

"The defendants are in safe hands, regardless of their nationalities. We have not been affected by any external factors throughout the course of the case."

Miserable Christmas for thousands of Europeans

AMSTERDAM (Agencies) — Thousands of families across northwest Europe faced a damp and miserable Christmas in evacuation centres after the worst floods in decades forced them to abandon their homes.

Floodwaters were still rising in parts of the southern and eastern Netherlands by midday on Friday, and scores of riverside towns and cities in eastern France and Germany remained under water after days of heavy rain that have killed six people.

More than 8,500 residents had been moved out of their homes in the southeast province of Limburg, Dutch Television reported, and more than 460 square kilometres of Dutch land were under water.

An official from the southern Dutch town of Geneppe said the next few hours would be critical.

"The dyke along the River Neirs is slowly collapsing, which will mean another 1,250 inhabitants will have to be evacuated," he told Dutch Television.

Police said authorities would use special powers to prevent looting, and outsiders who came to flooded areas would be questioned.

There was little sign Friday that the storms which have battered Europe since Monday were abating as the army in the Netherlands and the Ukraine were put on alert.

The storms hit northern Italy Friday forcing Genoa airport in the northwest to close, causing snow in Venice, and creating havoc on Alpine routes as

avalanches held up traffic. French weathermen put out a warning of avalanches in the Savoie and Haute Savoie regions of southeast France, where high winds and snowfalls have increased the dangers to skiers in this popular Alpine region.

In the Netherlands there were growing fears that dykes in the Gelderland province, which includes the town of Arnhem, would collapse under the pressure of flood waters. Twelve local councils had by Thursday declared a state of emergency.

The River Meuse continued to rise at between two to five centimetres an hour in the southern Limburg province where some 10,000 people have been affected by the deluge.

Crisis centres have been set up across the country as there were worries about the Rhine breaching its banks in the Lek, Waal and IJssel areas.

Dutch papers were warning Friday that the damage caused so far by the flooding could cost up to 100 million guilders (\$50 million).

In Germany flooding from the Rhine has already brought misery to thousands living along its banks in what has been termed the worst floods of the century.

Friday the situation seemed stable along the Rhine, but authorities were turning their attention to the maines as Frankfurt and Hesse, in southern Germany, were

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